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ABSTRACT

This book discusses the developmental characteristics and needs of preschoolers and how to create an environment that fosters growth in all facets of their development. The four chapters examine intellectual development, social-emotional growth, spiritual growth, and physical development. Each chapter explores the particular needs and characteristics of each phase of development and offers suggestions supported by examples of how theories work in practice. Chapter 1 looks at how learning occurs, stages of learning, five tasks of preschool learning, and the learning environment. Chapter 2 examines the components of social-emotional development and stresses the need for: (1) gender identification and sex-role freedom; (2) development of self-esteem; (3) the opportunity to talk about feelings; (4) good conflict resolution; (5) trust, autonomy, and initiative; (6) multicultural experiences; (7) friendship; and (8) moral development. Chapter 3 explores ways of celebrating aspects of life that have deep meaning, noting that children appropriate a sense of values and a healthy spirit from approaching life with wonder; from being close to loving, trustworthy adults; and from celebrating special occasions with enthusiasm and creativity. Chapter 4 discusses three basic approaches to physical development: informal exercise, formal exercise, and wholesome nutrition. The list of 76 suggested resources includes professional materials, children's books, curriculum materials and videos, and records and cassette tapes. (TJQ)

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The Early Childhood Years

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DOROTHY DIXON

SEE HOW THEY GROW

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The Early Childhood Years

DOROTHY DIXON
Revised by Carole MacClennan

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Introduction

Working with children in their formative preschool years is engaging in human development at its most basic level. At a time when the child is acquiring lasting attitudes and half the knowledge of a lifetime, the environment we plan is of utmost importance. Here we are, ready to share a portion of our lives with these little emerging persons. How can we enhance the quality of this time shared together? It is the purpose of this book to help us delve together into some answers to this vital question.

In a way, it is frightening to think of the privilege that is entrusted to us when we work with preschoolers. If we are parents, we are the most important teachers our children will ever have. If we are classroom teachers, we are called to muster all the skill, tenderness, and creativity we can possibly put forth. Some persons mistakenly think that nurturing preschoolers is not as serious as teaching at higher age levels. A volunteer

once said to us, "I don't know anything about teaching, so put me with the three-year-olds." On the contrary, preschool teaching probably requires more skill, sensitivity, and understanding than teaching at any other age level.

This is not to say that every happening will make or break a child. Indeed, we all have days when we wonder: "Why didn't I handle that situation better?" But our very earnestness to continually improve our relatedness to children is an expression of a long-term caring that will be communicated at deeper levels. A parent or teacher who maintains a consistent relationship of caring and sensitive nurture is making an impact of permanent value in human development. Furthermore, it is in a caring and trustworthy environment that children acquire the positive self-image and love of learning that will enable them to reach their full human potential.

So Many Rewards

Then there are the rewarding times. They happen when Billy hugs you around the knees (that's as high as he can reach) and hands you a gift of a small bit of paper with three scribbles on it. They happen when Sally smiles her endearing smile and exclaims, "You know what? Nursery school is the funnest place I know!" Such heartwarming responses let us know that the children are off to a good start in life and that they can approach learning with joy and persons with love.

What kind of learning environment will elicit these kinds of responses? There are many good learning environments for preschool children in homes, childcare centers, and nursery schools, and for each wholesome place, we rejoice. Each home and each classroom has its own unique personality, just as each individual is different.

We would not want to stereotype a place, and to say that one must be exactly the same as others. What we do wish to share in this book are some insights from one program that has nurtured little people over a number of years, and invite you,

our readers, to incorporate into your own environment whatever suggestions here that you think would be helpful.

Educating the Whole Child

At my school, we try to balance the curriculum to include growth ingredients for all facets of learning: intellectual, social-emotional, physical, and spiritual. From time to time we double-check to make certain each component is receiving its share of attention. For the purpose of analysis, we can separate these components, and discuss them one at a time. But we know that in actuality, they all grow together in the individual child, and that many learning experiences that we plan aid in all facets of development. For instance, the planting of seeds nurtures the intellect as it teaches biology. It is social, as children plant together. It is physical as the muscles go to work digging up the soil. And it is spiritual as children feel awe and wonder when they observe the mysterious workings of the universe.

In this book, we will discuss the growth components separately, in order to bring out the many possibilities there are for each. But all the while we know that they are all a part of one growing process, working together in the life of each whole child.

Just as we make long range plans, we also plan for each individual day's activities. We value the daily lesson plans, as assurance that the child's activities are balanced, in the same way one might plan menus for balanced meals. But we do not stick slavishly to the daily lesson plans. One March day we had planned to make kites with the children. But early in the morning we were greeted by the sound of a rat-a-tat-tat outside our classroom windows. We looked to discover that a crew of sanitary engineers were digging up a sizable portion of the street to put in a new sewer. The kites had to wait for another day as we gathered the children to go outside to watch the men in hard hats with their jackhammers.

Priority is always given to the child's need for discussion. When Danny comes in with news of a new baby in his family, or Susie brings her pet turtle to school, the lesson plan bends to the "ripe" topic for discussion. The combination of planning and flexibility is thus the clue to a really effective learning environment.

Creativity, Not Chaos

My school could appropriately be described as having an "open classroom" or a "learning center" approach. This arrangement consists of many interest centers around the room. On a given day for instance, there would be a table for fingerpainting, a table with a cut-and-paste activity, a table with a learning game on it, and also the standard areas of block corner, housekeeping corner, paint easel, woodwork bench, and water table.

Each child enters the room, is greeted by the teacher, and then gets busy at the area of his or her choice. He or she is joined by others who have chosen that area. But as they feel a sense of completion in one spot, the children, one at a time, move on to other areas. The teachers are available for conversation or assistance wherever requested. Children are thus allowed to exercise their growing skills in decision making, as to which activity they will pursue that day. By active involvement, the child begins to develop many concepts of shape, size, color, texture, sound, taste, and smell, in this multisensory environment. (One favorite tabletop activity is cooking—and for this, one teacher will stay at a table during the entire length of the activity.)

It takes a minimum of two teachers for this kind of classroom arrangement. One teacher may be involved in one specific activity while the other "floats" around the room to help as needed in the areas where children can usually work independently. The number of children in one classroom can range from 18 in the three-year-old room to 21 in the room of

fours and fives. With volunteer help, the number of adults in a classroom may grow to three or four, so that more individual attention can be given.

It is true that there are some children who at age three or four cannot cope with so many interesting activities. Occasionally there will be a child who is bewildered by the number of choices. Sometimes one teacher will need to guide one child from activity to activity, giving a suggestion of only two choices at a time, and carefully structuring the transition from one area to another. Occasionally, a child really needs to be transferred to a school that has a more rigidly structured curriculum. But for most children, the freedom within limits of this "learning center" approach is rich with opportunity for growth and development.

The classroom we describe is one that allows much room for creativity. There are many acceptable ways for the children to use the learning media. Patterns are seldom used, so that the child creates from his or her own inner aesthetic sensitivity, and no two creations appear alike. But it is not a permissive environment. The child knows that each medium has an area, and that it does not go beyond that limit. The blocks do not go into the paint area. The paintbrushes paint on the easel, not on any other surface. Fingerpainting may be done directly on the tabletop, because if used with detergent it wipes clean at the end of the period. But fingerpaint does not go off the table.

Children who are allowed this kind of freedom have their growing needs so satisfied that they seldom feel a need or urge to abuse the privileges. There is a minimum of disciplining because the children are absorbed in using their energies creatively. The room has a purposeful patter of noise, but it is not boisterous.

This is the beautiful balance between freedom and limits. There is much freedom to choose and do. But there is not freedom to abuse the environment or the people, and the children quickly learn the expectations of the room. This is the art of ar-

rangement with the deep inner needs of the child in mind. If a wood sculptor carves with the grain of the wood, an organically beautiful masterpiece is produced in the most effortless way. There is a sense in which the teacher is like that woodcarver. The teacher is planning with the needs of the children in mind, and in time it becomes relatively effortless because there is not the struggle to go against the grain of the learner.

We see, then, that the classroom and the home need both order and freedom—both opportunities and limits. The child who is free within known limits is the child in the truly creative learning environment. The teacher, too, has limits. There are limits to how many choices should be offered in a given day. Some experiences need to be saved for a less busy time.

The balance of activity between quiet times and noisy times, between small-muscle tasks and large-muscle tasks, between listening and talking, between creative play time and group discussion time—this is the kind of balance a wholesome learning environment requires.

Chapter One

Fostering Intellectual Development

Swiss psychologist Dr. Jean Piaget has given us some important clues about how a child learns. Probably the most important point he has made is that young children do not learn by being told. Rather, young children learn by *doing*—by "playing" with many objects, arranging and rearranging them until they have interiorized the experience or "assimilated" knowledge from their environment. Since the Piaget theories are the background for a good preschool cognitive curriculum, we share them with you in this chapter.

How Learning Occurs

The story is told that when the late Dr. Maria Montessori visited an institution for retarded children, it was reported to her that these children would get down from the dinner table and "go after" the crumbs on the floor. Dr. Montessori investigated the situation and found that the children were not at all hungry after their meal. They did not *eat* the crumbs under the ta-

ble. But they played with the crumbs out of an innate need to experiment with objects. In their classrooms there were no manipulative materials, for the children were expected to learn by being told. Dr. Montessori then proceeded to bring into the retarded children's classrooms many objects such as buttons and ribbons for these children to sort and count and arrange. She found that making this kind of change in the curriculum advanced the learning level of the children considerably. In fact, many of the children learned enough to be graduated from this kind of special school into a regular environment. The problem had been that the curriculum was so geared to paper and books, to words and commands, that the children were actually "hungry" for something with which to play, even to the point of going for the crumbs under the table (E.M. Standing, 1957, pp. 9-10, see Suggested Resources).

Thus we have learned that the intellectual development of young children is dependent upon the opportunity to touch and "tinker" with a wide variety of objects. As children do this, they assimilate impressions into their mind. Only by "assimilating" or "drinking in" a stimulating environment can a child get a knowledge of what the world is all about. After children "assimilate" many impressions, they begin to put like appearances together in their mind. They gradually begin to see that some objects are red, some green, and that some are round and some are square. They may even be figuring out that some things are large, some small, and that the large item may appear small when put beside something even larger. This is what Dr. Piaget calls "accommodation" which means sorting out impressions and putting thoughts into mental categories or concepts.

All of learning, then, takes place through these two processes of assimilation and accommodation, according to Dr. Piaget. We *assimilate* as we encounter something new in the environment—something that we see, hear, taste, touch, or smell—and bring it into our mental storage house of impres-

sions. We *accommodate* as we relate the new impression to what else we have assimilated in the past. Thus learning is like furnishing a house, if we compare the brain to a home. Assimilation can be compared to bringing furniture into the house. Accommodation can be compared to rearranging the furniture to make room for the new piece, and to make order or meaning out of the whole arrangement.

A child who is not exposed to many stimulating items or persons may not be assimilating very much. This is a deprived child who may appear to be dull, but is actually underexposed to the variety of shapes, sizes, colors, textures, smells, and sounds that life has to offer. But there is a point at which a child may be "overexposed." If too many conflicting sounds or sights are coming into the experience range of a child all at the same time, this is like bringing in furniture faster than a person could rearrange it to make sense out of it. Thus we see the need for the exposure to be paced to allow enough absorption time. The balance of assimilation and accommodation that goes on in each child's mind is called equilibrium. All of learning, then, according to Dr. Piaget, is brought about by assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium.

Stages of Learning

At different stages of growth, children have different outlooks on life. At different ages and states, children see the world differently. The viewpoint of a child is quite different from that of an adult, and even different from that of children of different stages of development. It is helpful to know where the child in your family, childcare center, or classroom is in his or her state of development. Then you can plan so that the child can move on from that stage to the next.

Sensorimotor Period

Infants are described as being in the sensorimotor period because they learn only by *sensing* (feeling, tasting) and acting

upon (*motor*) the immediate environment. When an object touches their lips, they taste or suck it, and when something is within reach, they grasp it. Thus by using ready-made reflexes, the infant explores and learns. But during this whole period, which lasts from birth to 18 months or two years, learning is limited to what can be immediately seen, heard, tasted, smelled, or touched.

Infants do not reason, but take all appearances at face value. Whatever they see they believe, but whatever they do not see does not exist, in their thinking. In this sensorimotor period, at first there is no idea of object permanence. Infants believe that they are all that matters—in fact they do not even realize that they are separate from the environment at first. They merely feel that the world around them is an extension of themselves. Gradually they come to see that they are separate from the environment. But when they do not see mother, they have no idea that she exists out of their sight. So an infant's first world view is "I am the world" and the second world view is "Things are separate from me, and they appear and disappear like magic."

About eight months of age, however, the infant begins to get a slight notion that things might exist even when out of sight. Dr. Piaget proved this point with his own baby, Laurent. When the baby was six months old and Dr. Piaget held his watch before the baby's eyes, Laurent gazed with glee at the watch, but did not try to reach it when it was taken from view. But at eight months, the baby saw the watch, and saw his father's large hand come between the watch and his own view. Laurent then reached up, pushed the hand away, and gazed with delight at the watch. So Dr. Piaget knew that Laurent was finally beginning to reason that the watch was there even when the hand kept him from seeing it.

When Laurent was nine months old, his father placed his watch under two different coverlets. Laurent would lift up the first to find the watch, but would not lift up the second, even though he had seen his father place the watch under it.

Evidently the baby was not enough convinced that the watch existed out of sight to pursue it in a second place.

But when Laurent was 11 months old, and his father placed the watch alternately under two different pillows, the baby would look under both pillows until he found it. We see from these examples a growing realization of the permanency of objects.

Dr. Piaget also points out a growing ability at reasoning. His daughter Jacqueline, at age 14 months, tried to bring a stick into a playpen. The stick was horizontal. By trial and error she learned to bring it in vertically, parallel to the slats. Later, she quickly maneuvered the stick vertically, showing how learning is derived from the manipulation of objects.

Thus, during the sensorimotor period of infancy, the baby has progressed from a totally egocentric view of life to a slight awareness of others, and a growing realization that things exist even when out of sight.

After two years of age, a child has enough use of language to be able to think in words or symbols, so the learning process is accelerated. But there still remains the lingering task of reinforcing the view that things exist when out of sight. Growth is never steady. A child will learn much about the permanency of objects, yet will still have times of wondering if things really exist when out of sight. Preschool children begin their third year with some language and some notion of the permanency of objects, but the task of consolidating these learnings is still at hand.

Preoperational Period

This period of life that spans the preschool years is called by Dr. Piaget, "preoperational." The "pre" means "before," and the "operational" means being able to think and act with a whole view of the situation. An "operational" person has a background and general understanding for the whole scene, so that each part is seen as a detail in a complete picture. The pre-

operational child sees only the details, without an understanding of the relationships among the details.

We have a picture of "Woodlands" at our preschool. As adults we see the whole picture, which includes tall trees whose branches meet overhead, and a pathway leading through ferns and fallen leaves. In the lower right corner of the picture, there is a small spider in a web. What do you think the preschool children say about the picture? "It's a spider," they invariably remark, because they notice the detail rather than the whole of the picture. Young children "center" on details rather than wholes. They are "preoperational."

There are several other characteristics of the preoperational child, which we will discuss as we share ways in which we can nudge the child on to more mature levels. Meanwhile, let us glimpse the further stages of development that will come after preoperational years, provided the environment offers enough opportunity for the child's active involvement with a number of objects and persons.

Concrete Operations Period

During the early elementary years, the child will go through the period of "concrete operations." This period is the time when children can see life in whole views—can understand concepts of size and shape and color but only in terms of concrete objects that they can behold with the five senses. During that period children consolidate their growing awareness of object permanence, and the permanency of *area*, quantity, weight, volume, time, etc., but only in terms of tangible objects.

Formal Operations Period

At about 11 years of age, children gain the final stage of intellectual growth when they can picture in their mind all of reality. They can think in abstract as well as concrete terms, they can develop hypotheses of what might be, and test fact and contrary-to-fact propositions. They can think in terms of ideas as well as objects.

This, then, is the sweep of the learning process, from the infantile sensorimotor period to preschool preoperational period, to early elementary concrete operations, to formal operations, which come in late childhood or adolescence.

Five Tasks for Preschool Learning

Let's look now at some of the learning needs of preschoolers, so we can have these in mind as we consider our own learning environment.

1. Decentering

One of the main tasks for preschoolers is the task of decentering. We have spoken already of how a young child notices many details, but seldom sees a whole pattern. This characteristic of all preschoolers is called "centration" because it has to do with their concentrating on bits and pieces rather than on wholes. Our task is to nudge the child along toward the ability to decenter on parts and perceive the whole. But it takes many experiences and several years, before the child begins to see the whole of which many things are parts.

This is why preschool puzzles are important, because they teach part-whole relationships. There are other learning games designed for this need that we use at our school. One is called "What's Going Through the Tunnel?" This game shows part of a fire truck, but the rest is out of sight. When the page is opened, the whole fire truck is seen, inside the tunnel. Games such as these can be made from magazine pictures. But practice in seeing that bits can be part of a larger whole is one special intellectual need for the preschool child.

2. Overcoming egotism

Even as we are hard at work on "decentering" tasks, there is also the task of enabling children to see beyond their own viewpoint. It is inconceivable to them that others see life differently. For instance if a four-year-old is shown a picture of three

mountains—one small, one middle-sized, and one large—in a row, he or she can identify the different sizes. But if we were to

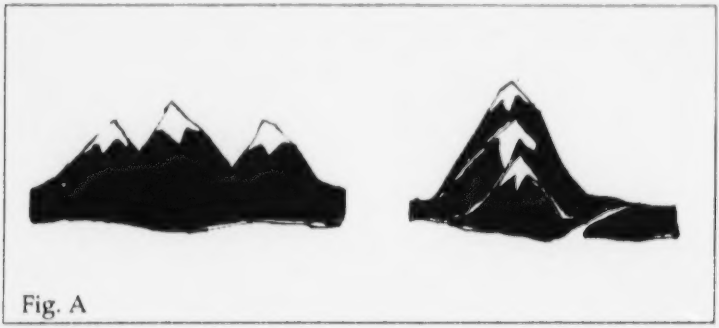

Fig. A

ask how the three mountains would look if we were standing at a different angle, the child could not identify the new pattern because it would necessitate taking another's point of view. However, an older child—say age nine, would probably say that the mountains look like three mounds with the larger ones appearing behind the smaller—but that is an assertion that takes more understanding than a preschooler can muster. To preschoolers, life is only as it looks from their vantage point, and no other way.

But we can help preschoolers grow beyond "egocentrism." We can plan learning tasks that move them along to a more mature awareness. For instance we can place an interesting block structure on a table. We can put four chairs around the table. We can have children describe what they see, each as he or she sits in a different chair. Then we can have the children rotate, changing seats so that they get a new "view" of the block structure. Then they can describe what they saw, discovering that it looks like what Susie said when sitting in the chair Susie first occupied, and it looks like what Billy said when sitting in the chair he first occupied. Games such as this help children to see that different views of the same objects vary. Children learn most by interacting with peers. When two

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children clash over a difference of opinion, eventually they discover that there are others who have views different from their own. Peer play is the best method of moving a child beyond preschool egocentrism.

The liquid in the containers
Fig. B

The two balls of clay
Fig. C

3. Discovering transformations
Another task is to enable the preschooler to discover the transformations that occur in properties. Preschoolers notice only the final outcome of a transformation, not the process by which it occurred. For instance, if there are two glasses of liquid, each containing an equal amount, the preschooler will agree that the amount is equal. But if you pour one glass of liquid into a differently shaped container—say a taller and thinner one—the children will say at the outcome that there is more liquid in the new container than in the remaining one. They judge by the fact that now the liquid registers higher than in the wider containers. They do not reason that none of the liquid was spilled, and that none has been added; therefore it must be the same amount. They judge by the outcome, rather than the process or transformation. (See Fig. B.)

Another example of this characteristic is the experiment with two balls of clay. They should be equal. The child agrees that they are equal in size. Then roll one ball out into a sausage shape. Ask the child if there is more, less, or the same amount of material in the ball that is rolled out. He or she will in-

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variably tell you that there is more clay in the sausage shape, even though none was added or subtracted in the transformation process. (See Fig. C.) But with years of manipulating clay and pouring liquid, gradually the preschoolers will emerge into the next stage of knowledge in which they reason that there is no difference in the matter unless some more is added or unless some is subtracted. Thus our task, with many materials, is to provide experience from which the preschooler gradually can learn to notice not only the appearance of an item, but also the transformation of *how it got that way.*

We are not so anxious to speed up the process of knowledge, but rather to ground the learners in experience, so that the knowledge is on solid foundations of understanding. Logical thinking will flourish in an environment that allows much interaction on the part of a child. The goal is not to speed the learning from stage to stage, but to *thoroughly* nurture the child through experiences that give much background for real wisdom growth. It has been said that "you can grow a squash in a summer, but it takes 20 years to grow an oak tree." In this analogy, the oak tree is the strong, lasting model, with the good long growing season. A child may learn to read at age three, but what is the benefit? Eye muscles may be unduly strained before readiness, and a late reader reads as well as an early reader. Instead of pushing reading, we prefer to have a school for *thinking* where logical thought is based on solid experience. Later, when reading comes along, it will have more meaning because of all the understanding that has been slowly accruing in the experienced mind!

4. Learning to think in reverse

Closely akin to transformation is the concept of reversibility. It is impossible for a very young child to think in reverse. Only gradually, usually beyond the fifth birthday, can a child realize that what goes forward can go backward, what goes up must come down, and what goes in may come out. Like a movie

film that can be played forward and backward, an adult mind can think in two directions. But to the young child, the event is finished in one direction. With this characteristic in mind, we can understand why a preschooler cannot stand to lose a game. It it inconceivable to him or her to reason "If I lost, someone else won. Perhaps next time I will win and someone else will lose." That kind of thinking requires the maturity of reversible thinking. Thus win-lose games are a disaster in a preschool room. They are fun for early elementary children who can think in reverse, so we save our rules games for later.

Meanwhile, experience with nonwinner games can move the preschooler along toward reversibility. "Go in and out the window" is a time-honored group game that gives experience in "in-out" reversing. See-saws teach reversibility, especially if an adult rhythmically comments, "Now Johnny is up and Beth is down—now Beth is up and Johnny is down." Or throwing a ball and calling out, "It's up, it's down" can point the way to reversibility. Stories can help children empathize with others whose feelings are real—to move the child along toward the goal of being able to see life from another's point of view. But if a mother says to a preschooler, "Please be quiet so I can sleep, I have a headache," it may be that the child will not be quiet very long. To the child, it is hard to understand that the mother's head hurts when the child's head feels fine.

This is not to say that preschoolers are not tender in sympathy—they can be beautifully responsive to others. When one child had a bumped lip at my school, another child brought her a toy to "make her feel better." This is simple empathy. "She feels bad so I'll help her feel better." But thinking in reverse, like actively taking another's point of view, is still a growing need for the preschooler. As helpers, we can only plan to nudge the growth along.

5. Learning of the permanency of objects (conservation)

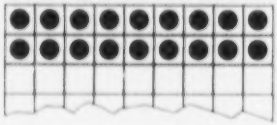
The final task for the preschooler is to learn conservation.

Remember how the child in infancy had no idea of the permanency of things? He or she thought that things just magically appeared and disappeared. The preschooler does have some notion of permanency—knowing that there can be things that exist even when out of sight. But that simple knowledge needs yet much expansion.

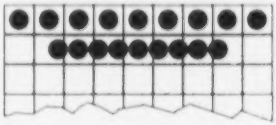
If two even rows, each containing eight checkers, are placed before a four-year-old, the child will agree that there are the same number of checkers in each row. But if one row is shortened, by pushing the checkers closer together (but removing none) the child will decide that there are fewer checkers in the shorter row. This is the reasoning of a young mind that has not yet learned that the number stays the same regardless of the arrangement. So the task is to develop conservation of number in the child—the ability to see that the number cannot change merely by the rearrangement of the parts. Many opportunities to arrange and rearrange the checkers will eventually convince the child that the number stays the same. (See Fig. D.)

Dr. Piaget once placed several eggs in egg cups. He asked a child if there were the same number of eggs as cups, and the child said "yes." Then he took the eggs out of the cups and put them in a bunch. The child then, looking at the longer row of cups, commented that there were more cups than eggs. Preschoolers judge by appearance, not logic. They think that things are as they appear to be, not as they logically must be. The practice of putting eggs in and out of cups, or checkers in rows will gradually move the child along to developing the logic of conservation of numbers. (See Fig. E.)

Then there is another task—to develop conservation of area. If there is a square with four blocks in it, and children see the area not covered by the blocks they will say there is more bare area when the blocks are side by side, than when scattered. It appears that way. But can it *be* that way? (See Fig. F.) Repeated practice with simple games such as this will help the child interiorize the logic of the conservation of area. Manipulating



Row 1:



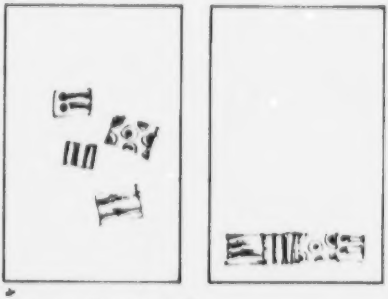
Row 2:

Are there more checkers in Row 1?

Fig. D

Are there more egg cups than eggs?

Fig. E



Which area has more free space?

Fig. F

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any objects is the growing opportunity that enables real logical thinking to develop. It need not be hurried. But it must be well-planned and varied, paced to offer enough but not too much intellectual stimulation each day.

The Learning Environment

Since the children learn by doing, our classrooms and homes need to abound in opportunities for experimentation with a variety of colors, shapes, sizes, and textures. Perhaps on one tabletop there will be construction paper shapes of triangles, squares, rectangles, circles, and hexagons. The children make collages by pasting these shapes on paper in whatever order they find pleasing. By arranging and rearranging these colors and shapes, the children are interiorizing the concepts of shape and color. If the shapes are of varying sizes, the children are also absorbing concepts of "big, middle-sized, and little." Or there can be Fall leaves to sort and arrange. Boxes, bottles, spools, and all sorts of throwaway material can be used for making three-dimensional arrangements.

On the commercial market, there are a number of construction sets that are educational for children in a home, classroom, or childcare center. Some of the favorites are: Bristle Builders, construction straws, Tinker Toys, Lincoln Logs, Crystal Climbers, and Duplo. The value of such materials is in the child's chance to manipulate and fit together the many shapes and colors. There is no right or wrong in construction sets. The child is free to fit pieces together as he or she pleases. Blocks are among the most important equipment in the nursery school—especially the unit blocks of hard wood, the hollow blocks that are larger, the cardboard blocks that are lightweight. Stacking, arranging, and rearranging this equipment gives a child a strong sense of the relativity of size and special relationships. Creativity is encouraged by the child's freedom to manipulate materials many ways.

But we also need learning equipment that is more struc-

tured. Sets that go together only one correct way serve a special purpose. For instance, picture puzzles can be put together only one way. These are called "reconstruction" toys because when taken apart they are to be "reconstructed." Reconstruction materials teach order in a "fun sort of way." Homemade reconstruction sets can be games for seriation (arranging in a series), or games for classification. For seriation, the task is to line up rods from the shortest to the longest. We can make the rods from dowel sticks, or from cardboard rolls, or from corrugated cardboard. The set will have lengths varying at regular intervals. Also for seriation we can have a stack of sandpaper pieces of varying coarseness. The task for the child is to line up the pieces from roughest to smoothest. In all seriation games, the task is to arrange the materials in an order. One resourceful teacher made some "listening cans" in which she put items such as rocks or sand. The children then had the fun of shaking each can and deciding which was loudest in the noise it made. Then the cans could be lined up from loudest to softest, in a task of seriation.

Other games that have only one right outcome are classification games. Here the task is to put like things together. Games such as this can be made with salvage containers such as our row of cottage cheese containers, into which the children sort different colors of blocks; or an empty egg carton into which children sort matching buttons, or other items. But the task is to put like things together.

Many beneficial seriation and classification games are listed in the *Workjobs* book by Mary Baratta-Lorton. (See Suggested Resources.)

Stringing beads is not only good coordination exercise, but can be a skill-producing task if the beads are to match a specified pattern. Children may put a red, a blue, and a yellow, followed by the same three colors in that order over and over again. More complex patterns, involving beads of varying shapes as well as varying colors, can be made, with the chil-

dren set to the task of matching them. Ideal School Supply Company has a variety of plastic and wooden beads, disks, pegs, cubes, and pattern cards that can be used to practice these tasks.

Then there are games that can be played with varying colors and shapes. Color and Shape Bingo, or lotto games with color and shapes are good if done *not* for competition, but for skill building. *Do Touch: Instant, Easy Hands-On Learning Experiences for Young Children* by LaBritta Gilbert (see Suggested Resources) suggests many ways to help preschoolers explore size, shape, and color. Preschoolers usually think that an item is either red or round but not both. Dr. Piaget once had a set of wooden beads, 18 brown and two white. He asked a preschooler if there were more brown beads, and the preschooler answered yes. But when he asked if there were more wooden beads, the answer was no, because it is difficult for a preschooler to think in terms of two attributes (color and substance) at one time. To play with sets of varying color and shapes moves children along to the realization of the many attributes of each object.

In the same way that preschoolers have difficulty thinking of two attributes at a time, they also have difficulty thinking of two roles at a time. Imagine the surprise when a pupil from the school meets a teacher in the grocery store, with a baby in her arms. The preschooler will invariably remark, "You can't be a mommie, you're a *teacher*." But the experience is good because it edges along the realization that we all play many roles in life simultaneously. Therefore we encourage our teachers to show children pictures of their own children, or to bring their children to class from time to time. (It is good for the teacher's children to see how "Mommie" or "Daddy" looks in the role of teacher, too!)

Beyond concept formation, there is the whole realm of the animated world that can be exposed to children. The animal kingdom, the plant kingdom, all the varieties of people and

customs on earth, the different occupations people pursue—all are a vital part of a preschool program. As the children visit places that abound in growing things, their world horizon expands. A trip to a farm, to a zoo, to a concert, to a hospital—all are delightful and highly instructive parts of a curriculum.

Just before Halloween, the children at my school visited a pumpkin farm. They went into the fields, and were allowed to pick pumpkins and gourds right off the vines. Imagine the mind-expansion that was going on that day! The variety of pumpkins was noted, the variety of colors on the gourds became a source of marvel, and the bumpy and smooth textures of the gourds were a delight for small fingers to sense. Then there was the observation of roots, stems, and leaves on the vines, and the unbelievable recognition that all this wonder grew from small seeds planted in the springtime.

Adventures such as these are actually growth-producing in all areas of development: They are intellectually stimulating; they offer social interaction as friends roam fields together; they are physical exercise as little bodies haul large pumpkins to the wagons; and they spiritually nurture the child's intuitive relatedness to all growing things and the rhythms of the seasons.

Summary

In this chapter we have given attention to "How Learning Occurs," the "Stages of Learning," "Five Tasks for Preschool Learning," and "The Learning Environment." It is our hope that more and more children can be exposed to a stimulating and creative environment in their formative years.

Chapter Two

Enabling Social-Emotional Growth

Rebecca and Catherine are in the "housekeeping corner," busily donning necklaces to go with their fancy long dresses and high-heeled shoes. They gaze with admiration at themselves in a long (unbreakable) mirror, and giggle together at the sights they behold. Totally unselfconscious, they try on garment after garment, visualizing themselves as grown ladies in spite of the fact that they are only four years old. Their projection of themselves into the future is a part of the healthy "stretch" of gender identification, and it can take place in a classroom during the creative play time when a myriad assortment of other activities are also taking place.

Sex Role and Gender Identification

A visitor for that day might ask "But isn't this activity a way of stereotyping the girls in an era of a more liberated emphasis?" If the visitor remained to observe longer, however, he or she would notice how much is also done to teach that role expecta-

tion must be very open for both sexes. Open role expectation means that a person should be able to choose a career without feeling limited by being a girl or being a boy. Even the hobbies and life styles need to be free from old stereotypes that would limit the way life is to be led.

For instance, the visitor here would notice that the small figures for playing "Community Helpers" are in double sets so that there is a doll dressed as a woman doctor and another to represent a man as a doctor. For each profession and trade there is both a male and a female figure, to teach that either sex can pursue each career. The teaching pictures of professional persons also come in two's—male and female for each. In the play areas, boys and girls alike are invited regardless of whether it is a place to rock a doll or a place to nail together bits and pieces of wood.

It is not always easy to create an environment where the role expectations are open. Society still has residues of outmoded attitudes, and it is not unusual to hear boys in the block corner shun girls who want to play there. Skillful teachers and parents need to muster their best sensitivity to enable play to be more open. Sometimes children's books can help build the kind of attitudes that are wholesome—books like *William's Doll* and *I Can Be a Truck Driver*. Books like these can build for a future in which society recognizes the need for daddies to rock babies. For how many centuries has society cheated men of the joy of feeling really close to their own children? The child psychiatrist Dr. Paul Painter once made the statement that the tragedy of many homes is that so many fathers are "psychologically absent" from their children. The kind of play that we foster among children can contribute to a future where both sexes can grow to be nurturing parents.

Not all children live in a two-parent home. Some live with a single parent, or with grandparents, or alternate between divorced parents. The play environment can be used to gently guide children to understand that they are valued and loved

by their families, no matter what the family configuration might be. Playing dress-up, or using puppets or dolls helps children to verbalize feelings about family relationships. Again, books can be used to bring comfort and understanding to children. Many books, including Norma Simon's *All Kinds of Families*, show children being valued in two-parent, single-parent, extended, blended, and multi-cultural families.

Another need in a role-free atmosphere is the opportunity for all children, girls and boys alike, to express their emotions. For how many centuries have parents said to their small sons, "Little boys don't cry"? How many pent-up tears have men carried into their adult years when the real need was to shed them when the situations were ripe? One year at my school there was a small boy who would not cry, even when hurt. Evidently he had been a victim of the outmoded "little boys don't cry" stereotype. Our concern was for the real feelings that were bottled up under the grim stoicism of that small boy. The teachers spoke often of how we need to cry when hurt, because crying helps us get rid of the hurt. One day the boy, working at the workbench, hit his thumb with the hammer accidentally, and he twisted his face in the grimace of pain. The teacher nearby commented quietly, "I know how much it hurts because I hit my thumb with a hammer a few days ago and I really cried."

The boy looked up with an almost "may I?" expression in his eyes, and suddenly let himself go in a flood of tears. The teacher took him in her arms, and held him as he sobbed, then together they went for ice to put on the injured thumb. The child cried for five or 10 minutes—long enough to release four years worth of pent-up emotions, and then went back to play with the brightness of expression of a person set free.

Another good way of opening the role expectations of boys and girls is to expose the children to persons who have pursued professions openly. Wherever there is a woman doctor or a woman dentist, let the children be introduced. A woman lawyer or a woman mechanic would be wholesome persons for

children to meet. Professional persons of different races also should be made available for conversation with children so that each child can identify with an adult who becomes a role model.

So we have explored the growing need to enable children to feel free to develop fully and freely and responsibly, regardless of whether they are girls or boys. This is what we mean by open role expectations. But there is still the underlying need for each person to establish his or her own gender identification. Gender identification is not open like role expectation. A basic need for each girl and boy is to recognize and accept with gladness the gender in which he or she was born.

Psychologists tell us that by the age of three a child must know that he or she is a girl or a boy. To accept one's own sexuality is as important as to be free in the role one will play in life. Sometimes in the move toward role freedom we may neglect the basic need for gender identification. It's important to bring to children's attention the fact that gender does not depend on how people dress, how they cut their hair, or what they do. Sometimes children wonder if a different haircut or type of clothing will change their gender. One year at the nursery school there was a girl who looked so much like a boy that the children referred to her as "him." Her hair was cut very short, and most children at the school wear slacks or blue jeans, so it is easy to mistake the sex of a child. How could we establish proper gender identification without calling attention to the little girl and embarrassing her?

Skillfully, a classroom teacher devised a plan. Just after group time, when it was time for the children to go over to the table for snacks, this teacher called each child individually, by name and by sex, so that the children were each reinforced in gender identification, including the little girl who needed this reinforcement the most. Quietly, the teacher would say "Now if you are a boy and your name is Billy, you may go to the snack table." Billy would rise from the rug area and go to a table. Again: "Now if you are a girl, and your name is Susie, you

may go to the snack table," and Susie would rise and go to the table. In this way no child was singled out yet all were identified as to name and sex, and it made a kind of fun game out of a most important task. Each day for a month this procedure was followed, after which there was no question as to the sex of the little girl with the short hair!

Thus we see that in social-emotional development a prime task is to enable each child to establish a wholesome gender identification. The two girls described earlier who were enjoying dressing up like ladies were really rejoicing their gender identification into the future. To do this they were identifying with an adult of their same sex. But those same girls are also learning that as women they will be free to pursue their own human development to the fullest, choosing whatever roles, vocations, or avocations they earnestly desire in life.

Developing Self-esteem

Having established "who I am," the child needs further to explore "how do I feel about myself?" Unless a child can realize his or her own worth that child cannot recognize the worth of others. Children who devalue themselves will project that self-distaste on others. The ability to relate with joy to others, then, depends on the prior ability to value one's self. How can we, as parents and teachers, enhance the self-esteem in each child?

The first step begins with our own attitude toward each child. Children sense how adults feel about them, and they tend to echo those adult feelings. As we examine our own attitudes toward each child, we may find that we have many mixed feelings. It is possible that a child may have annoying patterns of behavior, but our calling as a parent or teacher is to see beyond the behavior to the value of the self. Then in this framework of love and respect, we can help the child overcome disruptive habits. Regard grows for each child as association continues, and often it grows the most for the child who offers the most challenge!

Sometimes we find ourselves almost overwhelmed with delight in our relatedness to each child. Each child needs to know how much we value him or her. The psychologist Dr. Carl Rogers urges that all adults who work with children view them with "unconditional positive regard." It is only in this kind of emotional atmosphere that children really grow and thrive. In most cases children sense the way adults feel about them. The nonverbal expression of approval and acceptance is the art of skillful parenting and teaching. But words also help.

Whenever a child is helpful or creates something aesthetically beautiful, our appreciative comments can give the necessary encouragement. We can comment honestly: "Paul, I really like the way you have cleaned the table top—it almost shines!" Or, "Karen, I noticed how quickly and evenly you stacked the blocks away!" Specific praise is the most valuable type, because it lets the child know that you really noticed, and are not just trying to be nice. For instance if a child has painted a picture at the easel, even if it is a most ordinary application of brush strokes, we can find something about it that catches our attention. Then honestly and descriptively we can say: "Larry, you know what I like most about your painting? I like the way the blue and the yellow overlaps here to make this interesting green area." This comment is an example of what is called "descriptive praise" and it lets a child know you have really noticed his or her work.

Another step in building self-esteem is the planning of activities at which each child can succeed. Sometimes individual planning is needed for certain children. For a child to complete a task with a sense of "I did it" is not only exciting but is basic to good socio-emotional development. Success builds a positive self-regard, and this in turn enables children to relate with joy to peers and to adults. Occasionally, to give a child a challenge beyond past performance, we may plan a more difficult task. If it is successfully completed, the "aura of well-being" is enhanced. But for a child who is secure and has

already experienced much success in other endeavors, it will not be devastating to experience one failure.

One morning Joe attempted to build an igloo out of Giant Tinker Toys. He got the dome completed, but when he tried to set it on "walls," it came crashing down. Joe was heard to philosophically mutter under his breath, "Oh well, back to the drawing board!" (Fortunately Giant Tinker Toys are hollow and light so that even an avalanche of them inflicts no bodily harm.) We are saying, then, that occasional failure in a general pattern of success is all right. But the larger point is that most activities need to be ones that will give a sense of success and accomplishment. Frustrating tasks, far beyond a child's ability, need to be avoided.

The chance to do things for themselves is a vital need in young children's lives. When play time is over, the children themselves need to put the toys away. Parents and teacher can stand by to facilitate, or occasionally to work with the children, but basically the children need to exercise self-sufficiency to do their own tasks. In a classroom or a home where several children are involved, it is good to have general cleanup, with each person "pitching in" regardless of which area each child had used. Words such as "We all enjoyed the room, so we all help in setting it straight" avoid the kind of argument that could ensue if each child cleaned only where he or she had played. Committees for cleaning various areas of the room can give organization to the process.

Group cleanup time is usually announced by a song such as:

"It's time to put the toys away,
The toys away, the toys away,
It's time to put the toys away,
So we can play another day."

Cleanup then becomes not a chore but a logical part of the play process. The group cleanup at the end of a creative play

period involves all equipment that has been used by more than one child. If a child, during the group play, had taken a puzzle off the shelf and worked it, that child would have returned the puzzle already. But the value of the group cleanup is the fostering of a feeling of cooperation.

Competition for preschool children is not wholesome. It is very hurtful for a child to be compared to another child. Children can be motivated by seeing their work in comparison with their own past performance, but to motivate by comparing one child to another is to foster hurt feelings and even resentment.

An excellent way to bring a child's positive self-concept into focus is to engage in the process of making "All About Me" booklets. These booklets can be merely pages of paper stapled together, with a "cover" selected from the child's best artwork. Pages in the booklet could include: a hand print, a foot print, a "data" page listing height, weight, color of eyes, etc., and a page with a story about the child's family. These stories can be dictated to an adult who writes them up for the booklet. There can be a page listing the child's favorite foods, favorite animals, favorite places to visit, favorite colors, etc.

Another graphic way of building self-esteem is to make an outline of the child's body, on large brown wrapping paper, and then cut out the shape and put it on the wall. Sometimes the children like to color the clothing on this "life-sized paper doll" or to print their names on it. In this way each child can stand back and see his or her own figure. At the end of a year it is fun to measure to see how much the children have grown.

Whenever a child creates a pleasing work of art, the picture or art form needs to be recognized. This can be done by placing it on a wall at the nursery school or childcare center, or by having the child take it home for display. Whatever a child brings home must be noticed, even if it is only a strip of paper to show that the child can now use scissors. Hopefully, children's art will be their own work, not a "teacher-made" pro-

ject. Therefore the importance is in the self-expression rather than in the finished product. Children's art should be valued for its own sake; and not judged by adult standards.

Thus we see valuable self-esteem growing in children from a sensing of the adults' "unconditional positive regard," from appropriate words of praise, from planning for success, from opportunities for self-sufficiency, from "All About Me" booklets, from life-sized silhouettes, and from the prominent displays of children's artwork. Let's move on now to other components of healthy social-emotional development.

Talking About Feelings

Children have many feelings, and they need a chance to talk about them. In our small-group times, we like to give children a chance to talk about happy times, sad times, angry times, or fearful times. There are many ways of leading into these subjects, and each adult finds his or her own way. The important need is that time be set aside at regular intervals for talking about feelings.

In a small group discussion recently (involving one adult and six children), we talked of happy times we remembered spending with our families. It was interesting and encouraging to hear of the many special times the children could remember and describe. Emily told of going to an amusement park with her family and riding the "log floats." Jennifer told of her family's trip to Disneyland. Christopher told of how the neighborhood where he lives blocked off one end of the street and had a "block party" for all the families that live there. Another child told of a camping trip and "playing in a ditch" with his brothers. Rebecca told of the time her family went to the beach, and that even though she was afraid of the waves, she had fun playing on the sand. Andrew told of the wonderful day when his father took him to the zoo. The common element in each story was the experience of happiness in the family group at a time of a special outing. It was really rewarding to hear the

children discuss happy times with an obvious knowledge of the feeling they described. "Being happy," said one, "is when you just feel glad all over!"

With this same group, the next time we met to discuss feelings, the topic changed to the emotion of fear. It was just before Halloween, and we talked about "something I used to be afraid of that I don't fear any more." One child told of how he used to be afraid of Frankenstein. We discussed seeing this monster on television, and then we tried to decide whether he was really real. The children agreed, for the most part, that Frankenstein is "make believe," and that therefore we do not need to live in fear of him. One child, who had been listening to the conversation then expressed her own breakthrough: "You know what, I used to be afraid of ghosties, but really there's no such thing as ghosties!" Her remark set the tone for all that was to follow.

A small boy told of how he was going to be Batman for Halloween. We talked about how you can pretend to be anybody, but underneath your costume on Halloween it's really you. We agreed it's fun to pretend. But we also agreed that in reality "there's no such thing as a monster or a ghost or Batman." Separating fantasy from reality can be liberating for children. Then the imaginations can expand while the fear is minimized.

In order to sort out valid fears from the ones we no longer need, we talked about the times when it is really good to be afraid. We talked about crossing busy streets—when a little fear will instill caution—and about the sound of thunderstorms that drives us to seek shelter. This was a helpful discussion to counteract the notion that fear is a sign of weakness. Fear can be healthy if it is valid fear. But make-believe is fun and should not cause real fear in boys and girls who have learned to sort fantasy from reality.

Then there was the day when we talked of anger. Our topic was: "Something that really makes me mad." One boy told of

how it makes him angry when his brother hits him. Another boy chimed in that he gets mad when the older boys will not let him play with them. A girl told of how somebody knocked her block house over, and she was mad because she had just got the house finished. Another child told of a sister taking a toy without asking permission and the angry feelings the incident caused. We tried to keep the conversation centered on "what" makes us angry—not on "who." But the value of the conversation was that we enabled the children to see that everybody gets angry at one time or another. Feelings need to be discussed so that we can view them objectively and understand that they are a normal part of life.

If we discuss feelings calmly in a group setting when there is no crisis at hand, we develop awareness and language skills that can be used in more turbulent times. Then when a crisis occurs, and children feel the rage of anger, they have the ability to tell how they feel. Thus we build toward the use of words in conflict resolution.

To discuss the feeling of sadness, we used a smile face and a frown face on opposite sides of a yellow paper. We then discussed the way we sometimes feel happy and sometimes feel sad. Then we made a list of happy feelings and sad feelings, and the list read like this:

Happy feelings
"My big brother gave me a bike ride"
"My mommie let me help her in the kitchen"
"My sister let me play with her doll house"
"My daddy read stories to me"

Sad feelings
"When I am all alone"
"When I dropped my ice cream cone"
"When our dog died"
"When I couldn't go swimming because I had a cold"

After our list was finished, we read together first the sad entries, then the happy ones, and concluded by saying "Sometimes we're sad and sometimes we're happy, and isn't that interesting?" This was a way of recognizing the full gamut of feelings in life.

Some parents and teachers like to use books such as *Sometimes I Get Angry* and *Lizzie's Invitation* to lead into a discussion of children's feelings. There are many other resources on the market for beginning a discussion of feelings. (See Suggested Resources for a few of these—watch advertisements for new materials coming on the market.)

Often a picture cut from a magazine will make a good discussion starter. The face in the picture may convey such a marked expression that the child can talk about what they see, and what they think is happening in the picture. Then they can talk about similar situations in their own lives. Thus from a picture, or a book, or an announced topic, the discussion of feelings takes place with a few children and an adult, and the results are healthy attitudes toward each person's own emotions.

Resolving Conflicts

When we plan to meet the needs of children, there is a minimum of conflict. But considering the realities of life, inevitably there will be times when children tangle over some incident. Sometimes one child will hit another or grab a toy. Then there is the need for conflict resolution.

A few years ago we were given some good advice by a school counselor. He said, "When a child hits, do not ask why. The child will inevitably give a reason, and in his or her own mind he or she has justified the action. The better approach," said the counselor, "is to state simply, 'We cannot have hitting because it hurts.'" Then if the children are able to talk about their disagreement, it is good to let them speak directly to each other. The more that the children resolve their own conflicts, the more permanently they grow in ways of coping. But if one

or both are too upset to talk, then there needs to be a "cooling off" period. The offender needs to sit alone to think about the seriousness of his or her deed. If there has been damage, the offender needs to repair it. The more the consequence is logical, the more meaning is made from the incident.

But if there is nothing to repair, the offender could sit a few minutes to think about his or her actions. We use a small egg timer, an hour glass with sand, so the offender can sit and wait till all the sand goes through before resuming play. Or if the child cannot play constructively that day, we may say, "Today it appears that you are not ready for the block corner; perhaps you need to read in the book corner. Tomorrow perhaps you will be ready to play again in the block corner." As long as we use the term "ready," we are not saying that anybody is "bad." We are implying that though some growing is needed, there is no doubt but that this individual child will reach the goal of happy social interaction at a later time.

Often parents tell us of sending a child to his or her room for some offense. While the idea of a "cooling off" period is valid, as we have stated, the wisdom of using the bedroom as the "cooling off" place is questionable. To do so is to give many unhappy associations with the bedroom, so that it is no longer pleasant to go there to sleep at night. It is much better to have a "thinking chair" in the main portion of the home, so that the offending child can watch an egg timer run its sand through or sit in silence in the mainstream of the home. Then the bedroom remains a place for pleasant dreams.

When a child has been hit, or offended in some way, it is important for that child to use words to tell the offender how he or she feels. This kind of honest communication is not a screaming tirade aimed at the other person, but a direct telling of how one feels. A child might say "I have really angry feelings because you pushed me down and it hurt." The use of words to express feelings is a tremendously important art that can be practiced for the rest of a lifetime.

Children's books can be of great help in teaching children appropriate social behavior. Joy Wilt Berry has authored a *Let's Talk About* series that deals with many common behavior problems such as fighting, breaking promises, being bossy, interrupting, etc. Discussions can be stimulated by the cartoon format that introduces a behavior problem and the text that suggests appropriate resolutions. (See Suggested Resources for information.)

"Trust, Autonomy, and Initiative"

The author Erik Erikson has delineated eight tasks in life that the emotionally healthy person must accomplish. Three of these tasks pertain to the preschool years: developing trust, experiencing autonomy, and asserting initiative. The first of these emotional tasks is to develop a sense of trust. Trust grows during infancy years as a child is consistently loved, held, and fed. When an infant senses that he or she can depend on persons to feed, bathe, and clothe him or her, that child is well directed toward the development of this basic sense of trust.

Trust grows not only from the consistency of care, but also from the *attitude* of the caretaker. Babies, like puppy dogs, sense the way you feel about them. They know if care is motivated by love, or if it is just a chore. The unspoken relatedness, the sense of purposefulness, on the part of parents is communicated at deep levels to infants, and trust grows from a feeling of wholesome and joyous relatedness. Of course there are days when the work becomes a chore. There are days when the parents or caretakers are tired and would rather be asleep than up changing a diaper. But the general tone of caring, of interest in and love for the infant, is the main message that is communicated in the early years of a child's life, and it is those basic attitudes of parental love and dependability that enable a baby to develop a sense of trust.

By the time a child comes to preschool, the basic development of trust should already be well under way. But if a child

arrives who is unduly fearful, then teachers and other caretakers have the challenge of trying to move that child along the continuum from mistrust to trust. Extra love and care will need to be showered upon that child. And even for basically trustful children there is still the need to consolidate and extend the sense of trust.

An atmosphere that builds trust is one in which promises are kept. If a teacher or parent says, "Tomorrow we will...," then it is absolutely vital that tomorrow we do just as we promised. The atmosphere that builds for trust is as necessary in a home, childcare center, or preschool as is food for growing bodies.

Suppose we say to the children, "Tomorrow we will see this video again." Suppose that the next day we get hurried and forget that we have made this commitment. We might even reason to ourselves that the children have already seen this video once so it is not too important to show it again. But the important consideration is that we have said that we would show it, and the children are remembering our words. If for some unexpected reason we cannot show the video, we can explain our reason and plan to show the video another day. Whatever we do, we must not leave a promise dangling! An explained change of plans is understandable only in a climate where a strong sense of trust has already been established. Building attitudes of trust is the most basic task for emotional growth.

Routines can be a source of trust building. Children need a consistency of programming so that they can know what to expect. At nursery school, for instance, the day progresses generally from the creative play hour to group time, then snack time, then rest time, then outdoor time. The child feels the rhythm of the day and internalizes a sense of order and develops a trustful feeling. When there is necessity for departure from routine, it is carefully explained so that the children can anticipate and understand.

Once our three-year-olds took a morning trip to the zoo. They returned to nursery school just in time for the mothers to

take them home. One little girl (who had never before been very interested in rest time) said, "We can't go home yet, we haven't taken out our mats for rest time." Her internal sense of order in the daily activities was calling for routine even in the midst of special excitement.

Beyond the sense of trust is the need for autonomy. Autonomy is the chance to do something independently. Toddlers want to "do their own thing" in order to experiment with life and learn what it is all about. Among the first words a child says will be the phrase, "me do," or "all by myself."

It isn't easy to grant all the reckless requests of a toddler. The messes we have to clean after the soup is spilled and the pudding is all over the face, may discourage our allowance of autonomy for the small child. But within safe and reasonable limits, the child of ages 1-3 must have a chance to do many things independently, including self-feeding and exploration of a large area of space. When we limit a toddler too closely, we stifle that child's inborn motivation to learn what the world is all about.

Small children actually have a need to be messy. If we keep them too prim and clean we may be doing untold damage. Naturally, we cannot let them live in unhygenic surroundings, but we can plan socially acceptable ways for the child to be messy. We can plan for fingerpainting, for water play, for smearing a tabletop with shaving cream, for "gooey gluey" activities, and for as many other unstructured events as our creative minds can foster. When a child invents a messy activity, our first question is "Is it safe?" And if the answer is affirmative, our next response can be "why not?" There are limits, of course, to "messy activities," but within the reasonable limits these chances to daub and pat and smear a variety of substances are vital chances for the task of autonomy.

More sophisticated than autonomy is the assertion of initiative. This task comes into play during the ages of 3-6, and it involves creative play and work within a framework of re-

sponsibility. Autonomy was the reckless onslaught of a toddler, but initiative is the more refined expression of growing abilities in preschoolers. The rigid independence of age two, with its preponderance of language centering around "me" should give way at age three to the more "eager to please" activities, when language has a more "I will" flavor. Initiative is seen in the building of elaborate block structures, in the making of aesthetically pleasing paintings or collage designs, and in fanciful role play simulating adult life.

Initiative is expressed in a variety of creative activities. One of the most basic of these for preschoolers is the making of collages. A collage is an assortment of bits and pieces glued to a background. There can be an endless variety of collage items, ranging from bits of cloth cut from a scrap bag, to bits of junk saved from a workbench. Bits of paper, bits of packing material, items from the world of nature—all are good for collage making.

Initiative can be asserted in language development, as when a child "writes" a story or poem. Or a group of children may "write up" a report of a trip to the bakery. Children need the chance to assert themselves responsibly in an atmosphere where their efforts can be noticed and appreciated. Once a group of our children decided to have a "trumpet band" after they had been visited by a man with a trumpet. Taking the long hollow rods from the Giant Tinker Toy set, they began blowing on the rods and making trumpet-like sounds. The teacher noticed this group initiative and immediately played a rhythm record so that the children could have their band performance raised to a loud and successful conclusion!

We see then the progression of tasks from the building of trust, on through the experiencing of autonomy, and then to the assertion of initiative. By working at these preschool tasks, children grow in emotional health and wholeness.

Multi-Cultural Experiences

Since preschool years are the span of life when most attitudes

are formed, this is a ripe time for children to get to know and appreciate persons from a variety of cultures. It is fortunate if a nursery school or childcare center can have children enrolled from a variety of ethnic groups. Then there can be a natural sharing of ideas and experiences. But whether or not your class is ethnically diverse, multi-cultural education should be ongoing and integrated into daily activities. Language arts can include multi-linguistic experiences. Children learn quickly and enjoy greeting each other, counting, or identifying colors in several languages. Story time and free reading should utilize multi-cultural literature that depicts children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Multi-cultural cooking sets can be used in the housekeeping area and musical instruments from around the world add enrichment to rhythmic activities. Holidays from many cultures can be celebrated during the school year.

The parents of the children can be valued resource persons who bring food, tell a story, teach a song or craft, show national dress or art, or explain a religious custom from their cultural background to the class. This will help the children understand that while all people have similar needs, they can be met in different ways. You might want to study the countries of each child's ancestral origin, or study a common component (such as food, games, animals, etc.) from all the countries represented by your students' ethnic backgrounds.

The curriculum can be greatly enriched, too, if other persons from diverse cultures can be invited in. Try to have several people from the same country, but in different walks of life visit, if possible, to avoid promoting stereotypical attitudes. Once we had the good fortune of having a visitor from Ethiopia. The visitor told folk tales of his native land to the children who sat on the rug at his feet absolutely spellbound by his presentation.

In the homes, it is of utmost value to have dinner guests from other countries. A parent told recently of how she called

a local university to see if there were any foreign students who could come to her home for dinner. To her delight, a young couple from India accepted her invitation. Her children are still talking about the lady who came to dinner in her beautiful long sari. Such an event is enriching for the family and for the couple who comes to dinner. It is out of this kind of friendly intercultural communication that attitudes of mutual appreciation grow, and seeds of hope are planted for world peace.

Making and Cultivating Friendships

Basic to all social-emotional development is the making and cultivation of friendships. Children need peer play to grow and develop. Studies from the University of Wisconsin, where rhesus monkeys are raised in isolation, show that these primates will not mate in adult years if they have not had previous opportunities to play with their age mates. Children need one another in the healthy growing process.

Children also need to associate with persons of other age ranges. Older children feel delight with the chance to help bathe a baby. They also feel delight at the chance to visit grandmother or to talk to some older person. Actually, the relatedness between a small and a senior citizen is one of life's most rewarding experiences. There is something special about the association between children and grandparents. Where grandparents are not available, other persons of that age should be brought into the child's home or classroom.

Perhaps there is a retired person who can come one day a week to the preschool or childcare center. This regular visit would be very meaningful for the children, and would also give the senior citizen a renewed awareness of his or her own value. It is deadly to think of how many older persons live in isolation in retirement centers or nursing homes, when children could be a part of their lives. One October a group of children from our school went to parade in Halloween costumes to a local nursing home. The experience was beautiful because

before the afternoon was over the children were sitting in the laps of their new-found friends. This kind of relatedness is mutually beneficial.

One nursery school in our area adopted a policy of "grandparent power." The school actively solicited participation in the program from all interested grandparents. Another good possibility is for a preschool to "adopt" a nearby nursing home and make regular visits or send greeting cards (child-made, of course) on all special occasions. In this way, children develop friendships among persons of all ages.

Out of these friendships there should grow a sense of empathy—the ability to share the feelings of others. When a child can be glad for another's joy, or be sad for another's disappointment, then real empathy is growing. It helps to talk about each other's feelings so that empathy can grow. The ability to share grows from mutual friendships. The joy of sharing can come from sharing a toy, from learning to "take turns" on a tricycle, or the sharing of one's energies in making a "surprise" for the friends in the nursing home.

Moral Development

Dr. Lawrence Kohlberg of Harvard University has delineated for us the way persons grow in moral development. He tells us that an infant and a toddler are "amoral" which means that they have no understanding of what is right and what is wrong. Being amoral is not the same as being "immoral," for the latter is the condition of an older person who knows better but chooses to do what is wrong or hurtful. Infantile amoral status is understandable.

As children emerge from the reckless phases of toddler autonomy, they learn the first lesson in moral behavior: namely to "do good" to avoid punishment. Now this first step in moral development does not involve an inner awareness of the reason for "right" and "wrong" acts, but merely reflects adult standards and the need to conform to avoid punishment.

A little higher on the ladder of moral growth is the desire to "do good" to get rewarded. Early in life a child learns that if he or she does something pleasing, there will be a smile or a kind word from an adult observer. So children learn to conform to get the satisfaction of approval. If a one-year-old were left alone in a room with a birthday cake, that child might just grab a fistful of cake with no understanding of the need to wait for the party to begin. This is amoral behavior.

On the child's second birthday there might be the advanced behavior of leaving the cake alone because to demolish it would bring punishment. At age three the child would wait patiently (or impatiently, but would wait) because by leaving the cake alone there was the assurance of the reward of a happy birthday party with ice cream and presents.

This birthday cake analogy is a way of showing the progression of moral development. Preschool years are when a child learns what is expected of him or her, and generally conforms out of fear of punishment or hope of reward. But such primitive morality is all external. It involves little understanding of *why* certain actions are considered proper and others are not acceptable. Unless children go on to internalize their own standards of behavior, they will never grow to moral maturity. Thus we see the need for the growth of conscience in the child, and at age five this process should have some impetus.

How can we help a child reason at higher levels? How can we help a child understand that other people have rights, too, and that it is just as important for them to get what they need as for our own wishes to be granted? Kohlberg believes that children develop conscience from "wrestling with moral dilemmas." He believes that children need the chance to decide what would be right in a number of situations. Adults who talk with children can help them figure out what would be "fair" and what would be "unfair" in various situations. But the sense of moral justice grows from the child's own rea-

soning about what to do in a certain situation. It will not grow if the child is always told what to do with no chance to explore alternatives.

Open-ended stories for discussion are the best tools for moral development according to Kohlberg. A story can be told, for instance, about a child who broke a friend's tricycle accidentally. To avoid punishment the child ran home, and nobody knew she had broken it. But then the child thought about how the friend might try to ride the tricycle, not knowing it was broken, and get hurt. What should the child do? If she told that she broke it, she might get punished. If she did not tell, her friend might get hurt. What should she do? Letting the children decide is the kind of opportunity they need in order to "exercise moral muscles" and grow to higher stages of moral reasoning.

Further up the ladder of moral reasoning (in children of elementary school age) there will be the ability to act out of a sense of justice and fair play. In fact there will be a meticulously legalistic stage when children feel everything has to be exactly fair. A piece of cake divided has to be "absolutely equal" so that both persons get a fair share. This kind of rigid legalism of elementary years should give way in teen years to a new awareness that fairness is based on need as well as equality. Sometimes people *need* more than others, and therefore higher reasoning will consider needs as well as equal exchange.

The point is that children grow in moral decision making only as they have a chance to come to grips with what to do in a number of situations. Stories you make up yourself for the children to finish can be the very best tools in moral development.

Summary

Social-emotional development is a long and complicated process, and in this chapter we have seen it evolving through a number of components. We have stressed the need for gender

identification and sex-role freedom, the development of self-esteem, the opportunity to talk about feelings, good conflict resolution, "trust, autonomy, and initiative," multi-cultural experiences, making and cultivating friendships, and moral development. It is both challenging and rewarding to interact with young children and to see them moving toward more and more mature levels of social interaction.

Chapter Three

Nurturing Spiritual Growth

We were sitting on a rug listening to the custodian play Christmas carols on his trumpet. There was a captivating atmosphere of awe among the children and adults who were listening with rapt attention. Scott, barely four years old, who happened to be sitting next to me, took my hand and kissed the top of it. I looked down to smile at him and suddenly sensed that his action was a symbol of something wondrous that was happening in the whole room. There was an unspoken sense of elation, an expression of the inexpressible, a heightened awareness of oneness with the universe.

Children have an intuitive appreciation of the mysteries of life. Look into a small child's face as he or she gazes at a rose, a caterpillar, or a thistle. The wonder and delight give off a glow that is really an aura, an emanation of wonder and marvel, and an intuitive rapport with the deepest realities of life. There is an element of ecstasy—of joy and enthusiasm at work in the young child's relatedness to the wondrous. A sense of splendor

shining through the world is the gift the young child brings.

That sense of splendor is a special quality in the young child's life that we wish to nurture. What will happen is that we will feel our own ultimate relatedness grow as we enhance it in the young child.

In this chapter, we approach this task three ways: nurturing the sense of wonder, teaching through touching and trusting, and symbolizing in celebrations.

Nurturing the Sense of Wonder

What do we mean by the term "wonder"? Dr. Sam Keen in his book *Apology for Wonder* (which, unfortunately is no longer in print, but might be found at your local library) defines it as:

> The capacity for sustained and continued delight, marvel, amazement, and enjoyment. It is the capacity of the child to approach the world as if it were a smorgasbord of potential delights, waiting to be tasted. It is the sense of freshness, anticipation, and openness that rules the life of a healthy child (Keen, 1969, p. 43).

Then he goes on to say that a specific type of wonder is the objective of spiritual nurture. This special type is the wonder *that* there could be such amazing sights and events in the world. To wonder *that* is not the same as to wonder *why*. It is profitable for scientific purposes to wonder *why* certain phenomena occur, but it is more profitable for spiritual purposes to wonder *that* they occur. The goal of spiritual nurture, then, is to increase the child's ability to wonder *that* there should be such creatures as bees, mules, and giraffes!

Adults can learn a lesson from children, as they venture together into the world of nature. But children also benefit from adults who sustain and uphold this delight and reverence for life. Rachel Carson, in her book *The Sense of Wonder*, makes the plea for adults to nurture the child's ability to wonder. She states:

> If a child is to keep alive his [sic] inborn sense of wonder... he needs at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.

We plan for the children in our school to experience as many wonders as possible. Sometimes we take the children out on field trips to a farm, or to a pumpkin patch to experience wonders. At other times we endeavor to bring wonders into the classroom. Wonders thus can be seen in beans growing in a jar, or radishes growing in a planting box. Wonders are beheld in animal friends who visit the school (once the Humane Society brought some magnificent rabbits for a visit), or in gerbils who live in cages in the classroom and frequently have baby gerbils!

Blowing milkweed pods into the air, blowing bubbles, dancing with balloons and scarves, or "foot painting" on a long sheet of wrapping paper, all give the sense of exhilaration that is an experience of wonder. The children, being totally involved, share their enthusiasm joyfully and freely. The result is a feeling of unspeakable delight, an awe at being part of a creative process.

It is true that adults perceive wonder a bit differently than children do. As Dr. Keen points out, adults wonder at vast landscapes while children wonder at small details. This is not at all surprising in view of the fact that (as explained in Chapter One) children have not yet "decentered" their attention from the small detail. Also, the child stands closer to the ground, and thus sees the immediate more than the distant scene. It is not at all unusual for a child to be concentrating on an earthworm while the child's father is looking over the whole garden! Perhaps the child's eyes are even keener than the older person's eyes, and younger eyes detect intricate details better. Regardless of the explanation, it is good to notice how the focus of wonder differs between children and adults.

But it is even more important to realize that the *process* of wonder is the same: to behold, to delight, to cherish, indeed to be caught up in a spirit of ecstasy! Children and adults need one another in the realization of this spiritual experience.

A child's inner realization of wonder needs outer expression occasionally. The need is not for "preachy" wordiness, and not for over-extended talks, but quiet tribute in a few sentences such as, "Isn't the hummingbird a *wonderful* creature?" These brief explanations, like punctuation marks in a sentence, heighten the experience, increase the awareness, and bring the happening into focus.

There are many fine books whose illustrations and texts will nurture the child's sense of wonder. *Salt Hands, The Whale's Song,* and *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky* are three such books. Parents and teachers will do well to keep abreast of any new publications, choosing carefully the ones that stress the wonder and delight of the world around us, and the warmth of human encounter.

Teaching Through Touching and Trust

Spiritual development is not complete in the wondrous beholding of nature; it has only begun. The next step is accomplished through relationships with other people. Children acquire faith in themselves and in others by experiencing loving and trusting relationships with adults. Appropriate touch is an important part of these relationships. For young children who think, act, and feel at the same time, expressing relatedness through touching or being touched is a normal way to communicate. A pat on the back, holding a hand, giving a hug can speak volumes about acceptance, trust, and belief in the other person.

Love is expressed in times of joy, when it is buoyant and uplifting. But it needs to be expressed also at times of crisis. When children have been hurt or disappointed, they need the reassurance that somebody understands and is concerned.

Children must know that adults care about and value them.

The child who has been offended needs to be scooped up into loving arms. The child who has done the offending needs love, too, although that child also needs to know clearly which behaviors are unacceptable. Justice may demand that the offender sit alone, away from the group, until she or he has learned to cope with the situation. Or the offender may need to mend what has been broken or otherwise right the wrong.

Once Amy marred the walls of the nursery school by scribbling on them with crayon, even though she knew that her action would not be acceptable. We talked with Amy about how much we enjoy clean walls, and suggested that she help scrub off all the crayon marks. With sponge, water, and cleanser, Amy worked at the wall for the rest of the "free play" period. We helped occasionally when it took strength to remove a particular mark, but by and large Amy did most of the work. It was not a punishment, *per se*, it was a "logical consequence." When we dirty the wall we need to clean it. At one point in the procedure, Amy said, "I'm missing all the fun," to which we replied casually, "Yes, it is more fun to play than to scrub." But at the end of the period the wall was finished, bright and clean as ever, and Amy sighed a deep sigh of relief. She hugged us saying, "We did it, didn't we—we fixed it all right again!"

This little incident involved both justice and love, and the deep realization that while an offense is unacceptable, the offender is still a valued person. When children are treated with love and justice, and when promises are kept, trust grows and values to live by are understood and internalized.

So far we have discussed spiritual nurture through the sense of wonder, and through relatedness to persons. We turn now to ways of developing the spirit through celebrations that symbolize and dramatize deep underlying meanings in life.

Symbolizing in Celebrations

Spiritual development is reinforced by symbolic actions at

home and in the community. The celebration of traditions enables people to feel a connectedness to their ancestors and to pass on and reinforce their values and beliefs. There are two basic types of celebration that nurture the spirit: the "rites of passage," celebrating special times in each individual's life pilgrimage, and the calendar celebrations that occur at intervals during the year to observe times of special meaning in the community.

Examples of rites of passage are: a Buddhist or Islamic Naming Ceremony, a Christian Baptism, a Jewish Bar or Bas Mitzvah, a Hindu Sacred Thread Ceremony, a school graduation, a marriage, a funeral. Actually, each birthday celebration is also a part of the rites of passage.

It is very important that each child's birthday be celebrated. Birthday parties become ways of recognizing that the child is important, and that he or she is growing larger and more responsible. The self-esteem of a child grows as friends and adults gather to honor that child's birthday. At my school we celebrate each child's birthday with a song, special "treats," and usually a "crown" for the honored child. If a child's birthday falls at a time when school is not in session, we pick a day to celebrate his or her "unbirthday"! In this way, each child has one special day in the school year.

Calendar events from many cultures should be celebrated so the students can feel affirmation of their own family traditions and also learn that there are diverse ways to express values and feelings. These celebrations also can provide opportunities for parents and other visitors to add authentic enrichment by sharing their cultural experiences with the children.

One of the first holidays to be observed in the school year is the Vietnamese mid-autumn festival of Tet Trung-Thu. This falls in late September when the moon is full and is a time for celebrating the birth of the moon as well as its beauty and constancy. The Chinese also celebrate a mid-autumn moon fes-

tival. In Vietnam, children create paper lanterns shaped like animals or any object they can imagine and place these over candles that they carry in an evening parade. The traditional treat is a "moon cake" which can be baked or unbaked.

To prepare for a "moon parade," children use a rubber band to secure a piece of colored tissue paper over a flashlight. Next, they fold a sheet of typing paper in half and trace an animal outline on it, with the top of the outline touching the fold. Then they cut around the animal, making sure it remains attached at the fold. Eyes, a mouth, and designs can be cut on the body. The final step is to tape each side to the top of the flashlight. The animal will "glow" when the light is turned on. Children can take their flashlight lanterns home to help their families enjoy the moon festival.

Simple "moon cakes" can be made by sprinkling sugar, chopped almonds, orange peel, or bean paste on a circle of buttered bread.

In early October, we celebrate the Jewish festival of Sukkot, or the Feast of Booths. This feast commemorates the survival of the Jewish people as they wandered in the desert in search of Canaan. Every night they took branches and built little booths to sleep in. After they found their land, they celebrated the Festival of Booths in remembrance of God's care for them.

We have a wooden climber that is the right size for a booth, so we decorate it for this occasion. Decorations are made from colored construction paper—circles of orange to represent oranges, circles of red to represent apples, clusters of small purple circles to represent grapes, crescent-shaped yellow to represent bananas. The children cut these shapes from the paper and affix them to the booth with scotch tape. Across the top of the booth, the children place willow branches.

Meanwhile, at group time, the children are told the background of this festival in words such as these:

A long, long time ago the people of Israel were traveling

to Canaan, a land where they would be free. They had left Egypt where they had been slaves. They walked through hot, dry land looking for Canaan. Every night they took branches and built little booths to sleep in. God always stayed with them and fed them and protected them.

After they found their land, they wanted to remember how God had watched over them. So every year they had a big party. It was called the "Feast of Booths" because every family built a little booth and decorated it with flowers and vines and fruits and vegetables. And guess what? They ate and slept in their booths for a whole week!

When the booth is decorated and the children understand the story, a teacher and a few children at a time go into the booth and share fresh fruit. Just casual conversation on how good the fruit tastes can be a very meaningful part of the celebration.

The next calendar event that we celebrate is Halloween. For this event, pumpkins are made into jack-o-lanterns and special orange and black decorations are hung around the room. Children are asked to wear costumes (with *no masks)* on the day of Halloween. Then there is a parade through the building, as the children knock on doors to play "trick or treat" on all who work in the building. The children sing songs for the people in the offices, and receive "treats." Then there may be a Halloween *piñata,* stuffed with treats, which the children use in celebration. The *piñata* is hung from the ceiling or on the outer climber, and one by one the children hit it with a stick until it breaks and the contents "rain" down for the children to gather.

In November, all classrooms join together to prepare a cooperative Thanksgiving feast. Some classrooms bake pumpkin pies, some make cranberry bread. Other children help cut up

raw vegetables. The popcorn popper is busy getting more food ready for the feast. Meanwhile, a row of tables has been covered with white paper and the feast is spread. The children sit at the tables, a thanksgiving song is sung, and the feast begins. The value of this experience is that the children are interiorizing the feeling of the event, catching the spirit of cooperation, gratitude, and sharing.

Many December festivals use a symbol of light to express joy, hope, and welcome. A table can display an Advent wreath, a nine-branched Menorah, and a Kinara. Each day, a different symbol can be emphasized as children do activities pertaining to Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa. (As a rule, we do not actually light candles around children.)

When the Advent wreath, which marks the four weeks that Christians prepare for Christmas, is highlighted, the children hear a simple version of the Christmas story like this one.

> Even though it was almost time for Mary to have a baby, she and her husband Joseph had to make a long trip to the town of Bethlehem to pay their taxes. There were no trains or buses or cars, so they had to walk or ride their donkey. Mary was looking forward to resting in a warm room, but when they got to Bethlehem, there were no rooms left. The innkeeper let them stay in his stable where he kept his animals, and that is where Jesus was born. Angels told some shepherds about Jesus' birth, and they ran to see him. Three kings from far away lands followed a bright star to find Jesus. Jesus grew up to be a very kind teacher. He taught people to love each other, and today Christians celebrate his birthday on Christmas Day by giving presents to people they love.

After the story is told, the children are invited to act it out, using simple costumes that have been hung on the dress-up rack. Children choose parts, one being Mary, one being Joseph,

some being shepherds and some being wise men. And of course there is a choice role for the "innkeeper." A manger is made by placing real hay in a box, or in the wooden doll bed. An inn is constructed from large blocks from the block corner. Then simply, as a teacher reads the story again, the children walk through their parts, catching the feeling of the wonder of this special event.

This holiday affords the opportunity to share many rich cross-cultural beliefs and customs. Children also like to wear costumes to re-enact the Mexican custom of "Las Posadas." The children dressed as Mary and Joseph knock on many doors, searching for shelter, but there is no room for them. Finally, they come to the last door, where they are invited in. Then all join in a happy celebration of hugging and shouts of "Welcome!"

Christmas stories from many lands interest children. They like to hear and act out the story of Befana, the Italian woman who was too busy to leave her work to join the Magi in their search for Jesus. Now she rides around the world on a broom, dropping gifts in children's shoes as she searches for the Wise Men. They also like the story of Saint Nicholas, the kind and generous Bishop of Turkey who secretly provided dowries for a poor man's daughters. Children can make paper candle crowns to represent those that Swedish children wear when they serve breakfast to their parents on St. Lucia Day. The children are encouraged to wear these at home and do something nice for their own parents. The value in relating Christmas stories and customs is in inspiring the children to think about and care for others.

We show children the Menorah as we tell this story of a miracle that took place in Jerusalem more than two thousand years ago:

A foreign king would not let the people of Israel pray in their temple. Finally, some brave people got rid of the

king. The happy Israelites rushed to their temple, but they found only enough oil to keep the special temple lamp going for one day. They needed eight days to get the temple ready. They were sad because there was not enough oil. But, do you know what happened? Somehow the lamp kept burning—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight days! until the temple was ready to use again! The people were so happy and believed the continual light was a sign that their God would be with them always. Today, Jewish people put the Hanukkah candles in the windows of their homes to celebrate and remember this miracle.

Children can trace the four letters of the Hebrew alphabet, *nun, gimel, hay,* and *shin,* which stand for "a great miracle has happened here." These are cut out and put on the four sides of a dreidel (a spinning toy like a top), they have made from stiff paper and a pencil. To play the dreidel game, each child takes an equal amount of markers. All take turns spinning the dreidel to see if they win all, half, none, or must put in. Children also enjoy making gifts for Hanukkah. An extra special treat occurs when a Jewish visitor comes and shows the children how to make *latkes* (potato pancakes).

Emphasis on the Kinara, a symbol of Kwanzaa, introduces the children to African-American culture. As the children look at a large map of Africa, they are told that many years ago, a great number of African people were forced to leave their homes and go to a place where they were sold as slaves. Slaves were considered property and had to do whatever their owners told them to do. Slaves were often sent away from their families and never saw them again. Finally, after hundreds of years, all the slaves were set free. Today, African-Americans celebrate Kwanzaa to remember their ancestors. They want everyone to remember how important it is for families to be together. They want everyone to know that people need to be

free. They promise to work hard and help each other.

Children can use their creativity (one of the principles of Kwanzaa) to make their own *dashikis*, or African shirts. To do this they need a four foot square of white or light colored fabric with a hole in the center for the head. Bright designs can be applied with fabric crayons or sponge paints. Then they can wear their costumes as they use rhythm instruments to keep time with African music, such as that found on *African Songs and Rhythms for Children* (Smithsonian/Folkways 45011). It's fun for children to make their own drums by covering round oatmeal or ice cream containers with brown grocery bag paper and painting them with the red, black, and green colors of Kwanzaa.

The children can use strips of red, black, and green construction paper to weave table mats and make paper chains to decorate the room. This is a good time to talk about unity, another of the seven principles of Kwanzaa, by letting the children give examples of how they work together in the classroom and in their families. Kwanzaa culminates in a communal feast that might be provided by parents or prepared by the children.

The next calendar event to be celebrated is Martin Luther King day on January 15. A large picture of Dr. King is held up for the children to see as the following story is told.

> Look at the picture of this great man and notice how kind his eyes look. He really cared about people. He was a minister at a Baptist church in Birmingham, Alabama, and something happened that made him determined to do something helpful.
>
> At that time there was a very unfair law. The law was written inside the door of each bus, and it said: "White patrons please sit at the front of the bus, colored patrons please sit at the rear." This unfair law meant that if a person had light skin he or she could sit at the front of the

bus, but if a person had dark skin he or she had to sit at the back of the bus. Now everybody paid the same amount of money to ride the bus, so it was very unfair that some people got the best seats and some people got worse seats or no place to sit at all.

One day a lady named Rosa Parks paid her money and got on the bus. She was tired from a long day's work, and since there were no seats vacant in the back of the bus, she sat in the front of the bus even though her skin was dark. The bus driver said she could not do this.

Rosa Parks told her story to Dr. King who said, "We must do something to change this very unfair law. Let's gather everybody together and agree that we will not ride the buses any more until the law is changed." Dr. King then led the people in carrying out the plan. For more than a year—more than all the time you spend in preschool—the black people did not ride the buses. It was a hard time because many people had to walk to work, or share rides, or take taxis.

But finally the owners of the buses said, "We're not making any money. Maybe we had better change that law." So they made a new law that said anybody can ride on any seat of the bus. Then the people began riding the buses again. Dr. King had helped them get rid of the unfair law. This story is only one of the many things that Dr. King did to help his people have a more fair way of life. And because he cared so much about people, we remember him by having a holiday to celebrate his birthday.

One year the children helped bake a cake to honor his birthday, even though they understood that he is not alive today.

In February the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington are celebrated with pictures and stories from their lives. A log cabin is constructed from Lincoln Logs to help the

children understand the way "Honest Abe" lived when he was growing up. The story of how he walked two miles to give back a penny that the storekeeper had mistakenly given him is a favorite among the children at this time of the year, as is the story of George Washington and the cherry tree. Legendary though these stories may be, they symbolize the kind of character that these presidents exemplified in their lives.

Then comes Valentine's Day, celebrated with bright red heart decorations and plenty of opportunity for each child to fashion special valentines for parents and friends. We like to have paper, scissors, and glue sticks aplenty on the tables, and let the children work individually and creatively, rather than using patterns. If they need help cutting a heart shape, it is given, of course. But it is the child's creativity that makes for the most meaningful cards. Then Valentines are exchanged and treats are shared on the day of our party.

When springtime approaches, there is the promise of new life as old bulbs that have been buried in the ground all winter send up green shoots that burst into blossom. Baby chicks hatch from chickens, and bare trees send forth tiny green buds. To the young child, the basic attitude of joy and wonder at this time of year is of prime importance.

World cultures mark the coming of spring in diverse ways. In India, the Hindu celebration of Holi welcomes the spring with carefree abandon as people take to the streets, throwing water and colored powders at each other and playing practical jokes with no fear of reprisal. The evening is spent visiting families and exchanging sweets.

Buddhists welcome the New Year in mid-April by going to the temples to wash the statues of the Buddha. Then they go into the streets, throwing water until everyone gets soaking wet. There are boat races, parades, visiting, gifts, and forgiveness of past hurts so that a "new life" can begin with the new year.

The Christian world celebrates the resurrection of Jesus and

the promise of new life using symbols of palm branches, colored eggs, light, butterflies, and new clothes.

In Egypt, on Shem Al Nessem, people wake up early to "smell the spring breeze." They put on their best clothes, pack a picnic that includes colored eggs, and parade into the countryside to enjoy the day.

These calendar events suggest many appropriate ways to celebrate spring with preschool children. Decorating the room with the brightly-painted, egg-shaped papers is a good beginning. Dyeing hard-boiled eggs is fun and meaningful. Natural dyes made by boiling onion skins, red cabbage, or walnut shells are interesting to use.

Children can chop hard-boiled eggs to make egg salad. This can be stuffed into pita bread quarters. Some nuts, dates, figs, grapes, and fruit juice or minted tea sweetened with honey complete the picnic menu.

Once outside, children can throw spring-colored confetti at each other in a variation inspired by the Holi custom of throwing colored powders. If the weather is warm enough, children can splash each other with water. Other enjoyable activities include wearing paper flower garlands in a follow-the-leader parade, hunting colored eggs, having a rolling egg race down a slight incline, and floating walnut shell boats. If there are newborn animals nearby, it is good to take a trip to see them. The whole emphasis adds up to a joyful appreciation of new life.

There is occasion for other springtime celebrations. On kite day the children make simple kites and go outdoors to fly them in the wind. There is a spirited exhilaration as children feel the wind lift their kites into the air.

May Day is a day that can usually be spent totally out of doors. Often we spend the first of May out in the play yard, dancing with balloons, flying paper bag kites, decorating the concrete with colored chalk and the fence with crepe paper streamers. Foot painting on long strips of butcher paper adds to the feeling of joy.

Summary

In this chapter, we have explored together many ways of celebrating those aspects of life that have the deepest meaning. We have by no means exhausted the subject. These suggestions are only "for instance." Each home and each preschool or childcare center can weave together its own program of celebrations.

The important points to remember are that children appropriate a sense of values and a healthy spirit from approaching life with wonder, from being close to adults who are trustworthy and loving, and from celebrating special occasions with enthusiasm and creativity.

Chapter Four

Promoting Physical Development

Danny enters the outdoor play area through the gate. He spends a brief moment surveying the scene, and then darts off to the area of the large conduit pipe. Several children are already inside, and Danny joins the procession of little bodies that wriggle through the pipe and run back to wriggle through again. When the game gets old, Danny climbs up on top of the pipe, slides off, and climbs up again. Some days he will sit on top of the pipe for a while, in a kind of pause between spurts of energy, and then he will be off again, this time to make his way to the top of the metal climber.

Informal Exercise

It is through this kind of informal exercise that preschool children get most of their muscle-strengthening activity. Formal games and sports are usually more appropriate for older children. Undirected, supervised activity is the most appropriate physical development for preschool children. The skill of the

teacher or the parent shines forth in the way the play area is arranged. Does it look inviting to the child, so the interest level is high? Is there area for running, for jumping, for crawling under, for climbing over, and for digging? Do the items lead into imaginative play? Are all safety factors checked out so that no activity is hazardous? These kinds of questions have to be considered by adults through skillful planning of the play yard area.

Thought should also be given to the quality of imaginative play in the outdoor area. Hopefully the children will engage in adventurous games that do not include violence. In today's culture where television often conditions children toward gunplay, it is our challenge as educators to encourage more constructive fantasy. What a windfall it was at our nursery school, when a camp director donated an old row boat that was no longer seaworthy. On dry land in our play yard, that boat became a focus of creative play. Seated inside it, the children would ply imaginary oars back and forth calling out to one another, "Let's go to Noo-oo York!"

Commercial play equipment can be carefully selected for children's use. It must be sturdy, challenging yet safe, and suitable for a variety of uses. The best equipment will not be too pictorial—rather, it will leave room for imaginary play. A playhouse or a little log cabin can be the setting for much good dramatic play. One school placed the frame from an old pickup truck on a play yard, after it had been carefully inspected for sharp edges or other harmful features. Children would climb into the driver's seat, while others would "load pumpkins" onto the back end.

When a school is on a limited budget, many discarded items can be used for the kind of informal exercise a child needs. Old tires to roll are full of fascination. Some children will even dare to get inside and "somersault" over as the tire rolls. Big boxes through which children can crawl are among the best equipment. Or the box can be made into a "house" when "win-

dows" and "doors" are cut into it. Children can turn cardboard boxes into trains, cars, planes, buckboards, or whatever their imaginations can conceive.

Tire climbers can be made by bolting tires on top of one another, pyramid fashion, and these climbers have the advantage of being not only inexpensive but also intriguing for the child's imagination. Large wooden spools that once held cable can be obtained for play use. Children can climb on them, or even learn to "walk" them as they turn. Barrels are fun and can be put to good use for informal play—provided they have been carefully inspected to make sure they are safe and splinter-free.

Parents and teachers can soon learn to salvage and improvise with many items that work together to create a fascinating play area. Railroad ties make dandy liners for a sand area or a planting area. Sections of telephone pole can be purchased inexpensively and used for the building of platforms or swing hangers. If a tree has been cut down, why not leave the stump for a jumping platform? Or leave a few of the log sections for the children to "walk."

In addition to climbing and swinging on permanent equipment, children also get enjoyment and benefit from riding on wheel toys such as tricycles and wagons. The purchase of such wheel toys can be made with a balance of activity in mind—so that there are vehicles to give leg exercise and other items to give the arm muscles a "workout." Vehicles that can be used by several children together add a social dimension. For instance a wagon can involve the one who rides, the one who pushes, and the one who pulls. The wagon can then become a "steam engine," a "moving van," or a "tugboat." All it takes is imagination. Hardwood vehicles will last a long time and therefore merit the expense involved. Plastic vehicles such as "Big Wheel" are inexpensive, but may not survive more than one school year. There are advantages to having both types of equipment in a nursery school or childcare center.

A simple see-saw is good fun and teaches reciprocity. Children learn as they ride that when one end is up the other is down, and *vice versa*. "Jane's up, Sal's down," "Sal's up, Jane's down," the teacher calls out as two girls ride the see-saw. This activity is not only physical and social but also intellectual as the small child works at the preschool task of learning to think in reverse (see Chapter One).

For indoor play, blocks are among the most valuable equipment. Hollow wooden blocks are standard for a four-year-old classroom. Though they involve initial expense, they are long-lasting and precision-built. They stack evenly, and can be made into structures large enough for the children to get inside. Building and entering their own "houses" give children a fresh perspective on themselves in relation to enclosed space. Stacking the blocks away at the end of a play period gives not only exercise but also a sense of order. When children work together on this kind of project, they learn cooperation as well as physical development.

Unit blocks are smaller hard wood blocks that are solid and come in a wide variety of shapes. There are triangles, rectangles, squares, cylinders, arches, and many other shapes. These blocks, too, are a very wise initial investment because they are very durable and longlasting. Stacking and building with unit blocks, children exercise their fine muscles and explore some basic principles of geometry, math, and physics.

Cardboard blocks are inexpensive, and have the advantage of being lightweight and totally safe for smaller children. Even if a tall tower of cardboard blocks topples over, no harm is done. These blocks, which can be purchased from school supply stores, come flat and are to be assembled by the parents or teachers. They usually have a brick-like appearance so that "houses" built with cardboard blocks are delightfully attractive. Some are multi-colored and laminated so they can be wiped clean with a damp cloth.

Homemade blocks can be devised from plastic milk cartons,

where the pouring end is cut off and a similar sized carton fitted into the open end to make a hollow block with two solid ends. The cartons can be covered with contact paper for a more pleasing appearance. By making blocks from cartons of different sizes, variety is introduced into homemade sets.

We have explored here a few possibilities for setting the stage in which children can engage in informal exercise and play. The possibilities are unlimited in this area. We move on, now, to discuss another approach to physical development.

Formal Exercise

Coupled with the kind of free-form exercise already described, there should also be some directed activity for the physical development of children. Directed activity can be done with a total classroom of children, or with small groups taken aside from the other children. In this kind of learning experience, the children move at the suggestion of an adult leader. But even in this group setting, there is much room for individual expression. The children are not regimented, but guided into meaningful uses of their bodies.

For instance the leader may suggest that the children stretch out their arms and pretend that they are airplanes with outstretched wings. The "airplanes" can then proceed to coast around the room, "wings" still outstretched. Or the children can imagine that they are birds, flying or gliding through the air, and they can go through the whole-self motions of "winging" their way through the "wide sky." If music is played to accompany these motions, the experience has a heightened effect. The music could include symphonic "soaring" effects, or children's rhythm records.

At the beginning and end of each of these movement exercises, it is important for each child to have his or her own "space" from which to operate. So when the children have finished being birds, they can fly back to their own spaces to rest. The activity has an underlying order to it when each child

knows where to return after "soaring in the clouds."

Emerging again from their own spaces, the children can try other body skills such as galloping like horses, crawling like caterpillars, or twirling like falling leaves. Imaginations are stimulated as bodies are put into full use in these simulation exercises.

Even more formal than the simulation experiences are the guided exercise times. For these periods, the children stand each in his or her own space, and follow the instructions. "Let's reach up high with our arms—high, high as if we are pushing the ceiling right up through the roof!" Or, "Now, let's push our arms out to our sides, as far out as we can reach, as if we are pushing the walls further and further apart." Or, "Now, let's bend over and let our arms hang limp like rag dolls, and then reach way down to touch our toes with our fingers."

Sometimes these exercises can be set to song, such as the musical instructions to touch "heads, shoulders, knees, and toes." Once the children learn a sequence, they can then elaborate upon it. For instance the teacher may suggest going through the touching of head, shoulders, knees, and toes very slowly, as in slow motion movies. After the slow motion, the group can then try fast motion, going through the touching sequence very rapidly, like a speeded-up record player. The children are thus getting not only exercise but also concept formation about fast and slow!

Another method of guided exercise is the "problem-solving" approach. In this approach, the children as a group are presented with a challenge but are not given specific ways to meet it. The teacher could ask the children, for example, how they could support their bodies with only one body part touching the ground. To meet the challenge, one child might stand on one foot, while another might sit on his bottom with legs and arms in the air. Both children would have met the challenge, and the leader would happily acknowledge their success.

Then the teacher could ask for an example of supporting the body on two supports. This is, of course, the easiest challenge, because it can be met merely by standing on two feet. But clever children will think up other ways, such as using one foot and one hand on the ground, with the rest of the body above. Another might sit and put one foot on the ground. All are correct as long as only two parts of the body touch the ground. Then the instructions could go on to suggest resting the body on three supports. It might be two legs and a hand, or it might be two hands and a foot. Four-year-olds go for this problem-solving approach because it gives them a challenge not only in body use but also with numbers. The challenge could go on up to five supports, such as two hands, two feet, and a head!

Then there could be a new "wrinkle" to the problem-solving. The leader could pose this problem: "How many ways can you think of to get your body from one side of the room to the other?" The children are soon busy demonstrating these ways, which include hopping, jumping, skipping, walking, running, crawling, rolling, skooting, or wriggling. Children might take turns demonstrating their ways, so that the leader can write down and read back the many suggestions that have been explored. Then the problem-solving challenge could change again. The teacher might pose this new problem: "How many ways can you find to move a chair from one side of the room to the other?" The children are then busily engaged in pushing the chair, pulling the chair, carrying the chair, rolling the chair, etc. Perhaps one child will think of bringing in another object such as a wagon for transporting the chair. In any event, the children are having fun, getting exercise, and developing thinking skills all at the same time!

Other exercise games can involve the use of rope. Children can play "tug of war," can jump the rope, or can make a rope circle on the floor. Then they can play jumping in and out of the rope circle. Or they can have several ropes and make several circles. They can then do different motions in the different

circles, such as hopping in one, jumping in another, and crawling into the third. Where there are several different challenges such as this, we have a sequence activity that invites children to remember the order of entering and exiting from each area.

Sequence activities are popular and developmentally sound. "Follow the Leader" is a time-honored sequence activity in which children follow and imitate the actions of the first child in the line. In the original game, the "leader" originates his or her own sequence. But then there can be an obstacle course set up by the teacher where the children all follow a prescribed routine. The advantage of the obstacle course is that it can be carefully planned to give a good variety of experiences. A good obstacle course will have something for the children to go over, something to go under, something to go around, something to go through, and items to go between. This kind of obstacle course teaches prepositional directions of "over, under, around, through, and between." It is important for children to learn to see themselves in relation to their environment, and to learn this kind of directionality in an atmosphere of games and fun.

A story will make the obstacle course even more exciting. For instance there is a book called *Bears in the Night* that tells of bears at home in bed hearing night noises. They get out of bed, go down the tree, over the bridge, under the log, around the lake, through the meadow until—"Whoo" they hear and see the owl. Then they reverse direction to go back through the meadow, around the lake, under the log, over the bridge, up the tree, and back to bed again. Have your children imitate these motions. By the end of the story they have enacted the story, have had experience in maneuvering their bodies in many positions, and have had one more experience in learning the concept of reversibility!

In addition to these activities, we can also plan for challenges using masking tape on a bare floor. We can make a large square, at least five by five feet. The children can lie in

the square and see if they can stretch their arms and legs out to touch each side. This may make a big stretch for some children but the challenge is to see how "big" they can make their bodies stretch.

We can then have a small square, no more than two feet across. The new challenge is to have the children curl up inside the square to see how small they can make their bodies. They may need to try several positions—such as the knee-chest position, to find the way to be "smallest." This is not a competitive game but a challenge for the child's own use of body movement.

A long straight line of masking tape on the floor can be used for "tightrope" walking. This exercise gives children "heel-toe" practice, and can also be tried in reverse (walking backward on the line). Then a variation can be walking astride the line, with one foot on each side. A more challenging variation is to have them walk astride the line with feet criss-crossing the line, with the left foot going to the right of the line and the right foot going to the left of the line, alternating in a kind of zig-zag manner.

Construction paper footprints taped to the floor are good for teaching left-right directionality. Place the footprints (cut to obviously show the form of a left and a right foot) in a path that is comfortable for the children to walk. If the left footprints are a different color from the right, the experience is highlighted. Then let the children call out "left," "right" as they step from footprint to footprint!

With imagination, a teacher can "rig" up many such adventures for small children. Challenges such as, "Can you find a partner and make a square of your two bodies together?" are for more advanced children. Or, "Can you make a triangle with two persons together?" Or, "Can you make a triangle of three persons together?" Or, "Can you make a rectangle of four persons together?" These more advanced exercises give practice in working together as well as solving challenges that involve whole bodies.

With rhythm instruments (which can be bought or homemade) the children can march to music and feel the lilting spirit of celebration. Or if it is time to have a more quiet experience, let the children sit on a rug and go through the motions of finger plays. Parents and teachers should have a repertoire of finger plays to do with small children. Such classics as "Where is Thumbkin?" or "Open, shut them" or "Eensie-Teensie Spider" are always handy for group relaxation.

Fingerplays

Where is Thumbkin?

(One thumb is held up, other hand behind back)
"Where is Thumbkin? Where is Thumbkin?"
(Other hand appears, with thumb up, fingers curled)
"Here I am, Here I am."
(First thumb asks)
"How are you today, then?"
(Second thumb answers)
"Very well, I thank you"
(Both thumbs go behind back)
"Run away, Run away!"
(Index finger is held up, other hand behind back;
motions are the same as with the thumbs)
"Where is pointer? Where is pointer?"
"Here I am. Here I am."
"How are you today, then?"
"Very well, I thank you."
"Run away. Run away!"
(Repeat these motions with third and fourth, then fifth fingers, using the questions:)
"Where is tall one?" (third finger)
"Where is ring one?" (fourth finger)
"Where is pinky?" (fifth finger).

Eensie-Teensie Spider
Eensie-teensie spider went up a water spout;
Down came the rain and washed the spider out.
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain;
Eensie-teensie spider went up the spout again.

Open, Shut Them
Open, shut them; open, shut them,
Give a little clap;
Open, shut them; open, shut them,
Put them in your lap.

Creep them, creep them,
Creep them, creep them,
Right up to your chin!
Open up your little mouth,
But do not put them in.

Group time can also be an occasion for "Going on a Bear Hunt" (described below) in which the leader gives out a phrase and a motion that the children mimic as the story progresses.

The Bear Hunt
Leader sits facing children as they sit cross-legged on a rug. Leader says each phrase, making hand motions to go with it; children echo each phrase and motion after the leader, as follows:

"We're going on a bear hunt" (pat hands alternately on knees to make a walking sound).
"We're walking through the woods" (more walking sounds).
"We come to a meadow" (stop walking sounds).
"We look out over the meadow" (hand to foreheads as if looking far away).

"We go through the meadow—tall grass" (Hands make motions as if separating tall grass).

"We come to a lake, gotta swim it" (arms make swimming motions).

"We come to a mountain, gotta climb it" (Arms make motions of going up one side and down the other)

"WE SEE A BEAR! Quick, run back home" (with each phrase, repeat motions rapidly).

"Over the mountain."

"Swim the lake."

"Go through the meadow, tall grass."

"Go through the woods."

"We're home!"

The opportunities for group exercise activities are unlimited, and the books in the Suggested Resources (at the back of the book) can add to your own growing repertoire as a parent or teacher.

Occasionally, children enjoy circle games such as "Duck, Duck, Goose." For a game such as this, the children sit in a circle on the floor. One child becomes "it" and travels around the outside of the circle touching each child on the head and saying, "duck," for each person. Then without warning the child who is "it" will touch one child and instead of saying, "duck" will say, "goose." The child designated as "goose" must get up and chase "it" around the circle to touch him or her. "It" runs around and sits down in the place of the child who was chosen "goose" so that "goose" now becomes the new "it" and the game continues.

This game can be mind-expanding if the designations are changed from time to time. For instance, instead of naming each child by one name, the person being "it" can make each child a different name within one category. If the category is fruit, "it" can say as he touches the children's heads, "apples," "pears," "oranges," "grapes"—and then name something that

is not in the fruit category such as "hot dogs!" "Hot dogs" must jump up and run around the circle in the same way that "goose" did in the earlier version of the game. This form of the game requires the children to think about like objects in a category and to distinguish the word that does not fit. Many variations on this basic game can be fun and good for thinking and physical skills. The book *Musical Games, Fingerplays, and Rhythmic Activities for Early Childhood* listed in the Suggested Resources has many good games for physical development.

Then, of course, there are the time-honored physical activities centering around balls and bean bags. A simple game of tossing a large ball is a good beginning. First have the children in a circle and toss the ball to one child, calling that child by name, for a good "get acquainted" experience. That child can come into the center of the circle and call another child by name and toss the ball, and so on. Bean bags can be used in this way also. But with preschool children, it is important not to have games that involve competition. The goal is the fun of the activity and the body-building exercise.

Wholesome Nutrition

Physical development involves not only exercise but also nutrition. Too often children think of snacks as something sweet. Our task as parents and teachers is to enable them to enjoy foods that are nutritious. Nursery schools usually begin in September for the school year. September is apple time. It can be exciting to go to an apple tree and gather the ripe fruit from the branches. Then when the apples are brought back to the home or classroom, the children are already interested in how they taste.

Apples can be served raw, whole or sliced. If sliced across, they will show the seed pattern that resembles a star. Other apples can be cooked into applesauce, or made into uncooked applesauce with the aid of a blender. Apples can also be made into tarts, pies, apple butter, or apple juice. It is exciting and nutritious to see how many ways we can enjoy this great fall

fruit. Other fruits, too, can be "celebrated" in this kind of varied approach. Perhaps there are books that will carry out the apple theme into story time—books such as *Johnny Appleseed*.

Good snacks can be made with crackers and peanut butter or crackers and cheese spread. Let the children spread their own crackers because they need to learn this motion! If the food is interesting and filling, it is not necessary to have a sweet drink at each snack time.

Raw vegetables can be as exciting as raw fruit, if the children have had a chance to prepare them themselves. Children love to scrape carrots and cut celery stalks and pull apart the little "flowers" on a head of cauliflower. Books that show how things grow with roots, stems, and leaves can heighten the interest in vegetables. A trip to the grocery store to buy the raw vegetables is educational. Then at snack time, these raw treats can be enjoyed with a non-fat yogurt dip. If children, early in life, develop a taste for nutritional foods, rather than starchy ones, they may avoid the excessive weight problems that many people today struggle with.

What can be more fun than cooking in the classroom? It is fascinating to children to measure, stir, and pour the ingredients for making bread. To see the dough go into the oven in a moist form and come out solid is truly one of the wonders of life. Sometimes our children make bread sticks, so that each child can roll out his or her own dough and shape it individually. To eat one's own creation is a treat long to be remembered!

Finger jello can be made from the recipe on an unflavored gelatin box, and it is not only nutritious but educational. In a short period of time the gelatin changes from liquid to solid, so that it can be cut in squares and eaten like a little cake. Another adventure from liquid to solid is the making of butter. A small amount of whipping cream in a baby food jar can be shaken for about five minutes and will turn into butter. The children can then spread it on soda crackers and use it for a snack.

Suggestions for many more ways to get children excited about good nutrition are contained in the book *Creative Food Experiences for Children*.

Part of a valid preschool curriculum should be the learning of the basic food groups. Children as young as three or four can identify foods as belonging to the "bread and cereal" group, or the "fruits" group, or the "vegetables" group, or the "dairy products" group, or the "meats and fish" group. A game of "lotto" can be played with pictures from the various food groups. The United States Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services recently published a "Food Guide Pyramid" to help people make good nutritional choices. A large poster of the "Food Guide Pyramid" can help children see how the food groups fit in a daily plan for healthy eating. If children learn early in life the balanced dietary needs of the human body, they develop eating patterns that make for health and long life.

Childcare centers can plan menus that exemplify the five food groups, and it is a good idea to let the children talk ahead of time about what to expect at the next meal. Children increase their appetites and interest in food through this kind of educational approach. Families, too, need to involve children in an awareness of the foods served and reason for each. This is not to make a chore of eating, but to heighten interest.

Along with knowing the food groups, children can also benefit from a study of their own body parts. A simplified study of the human body can help children understand themselves better, and take better care of their own bodies. *My Amazing Body*, distributed by American Guidance Service, is a split page book that shows layer by layer what is inside the body. It is also important for children to learn about their private body parts at an early age. Many good sexual abuse prevention programs and drug free programs are available to help preschool children learn to feel confident and be safe.

Summary

We have explored together in this chapter three basic approaches to physical development: informal exercise, formal exercise, and wholesome nutrition. Growing bodies are wonders that unfold in a seemingly miraculous way, yet we as parents and teachers can enjoy the privilege of being a helpful part of the developing process.

Epilogue

We have been exploring together in these pages the many ways in which young children grow and develop. We have explored some of the ways of intellectual development, social-emotional growth, spiritual growth, and physical development. Above all, we have noted that this optimum growth does not "just happen." It takes the sensitivity and skill of adult planners—parents and teachers—to organize the environment that nurtures children in their positive unfolding. This environment needs careful attention, so that all facets of development can take place. Although we have studied these growth areas separately in each chapter, we know that in actuality, the child grows as a whole person, with the advances in the many areas happening simultaneously. This kind of balanced growth makes for wholeness of personhood, and is the goal of all human development.

As educators of small children, then, we are entrusted with the challenge of nurturing our little ones through these kinds

of well-rounded programs. It is not enough to concentrate on only one facet of growth, because we have been given a whole child to guide and nurture. Our challenge is great, our privilege is overwhelming, our frustrations are inevitable, and our joys will be beyond measure! Kahlil Gibran in his book *The Prophet* has these words of wisdom for all who work with small children:

> You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
>
> The Archer sees his mark on the pathway of the infinite, and He bends you with his might that His arrows may go swift and far.
>
> Let your bending in the Archer's hands be for gladness;
>
> For as he loves the arrow that flies, so
>
> He loves also the bow that is stable.

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American Guidance Service, Circle Pines, MN 55014-1796 (800-328-2560). "Developing Understanding of Self and Others." (AGS also offers a comprehensive selection of materials for language arts, mathematics, health, and science.)

Educational Activities, Inc., Baldwin, NY 11510 (800-645-3739). Multi-media kits for nutrition, conflict resolution, and language arts. Videos for multicultural education, movement, health, and social skills. Large selection of audio cassettes.

Encounter Video, Inc., Portland, OR 97210 (800-677-7606). "Where in the World: Kids Explore..." (Emmy award winning geography series for children.)

Food Guide Pyramid Poster, Box FGP-FN, National Livestock and Meat Board, 444 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611. (Cost $1 00)

Guidance Associates, Mount Kisco, NY 10549-0010 (800-431-1242). Sesame Street videos for language arts, science, health, self-esteem, and social skills.

Ideal School Supply Co., 11000 Lavergne Ave., Oak Lawn, IL 60453 (708-425-0800). Large variety of manipulatives and other learning materials.

Lakeshore Learning Materials, 2695 E. Dominguez St., P.O. Box 6261, Carson, CA 90749 (800-421-5354). Large selection of early childhood learning materials, including many multi-cultural resources such as "People Colors" markers and craft paper.

Little People's Workshop, Louisville, KY 40253 (800-626-1554). Comprehensive guides and curriculum materials for daily developmentally appropriate learning activities for children two to six.

Records and Cassette Tapes

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OTHER TITLES BY DOROTHY DIXON:

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